

S E R M O N S

O N

SEVERAL SUBJECTS,

By THOMAS SECKER, LL.D.

Late Lord Archbishop of CANTERBURY.

Published from the original Manuscripts,

By BEILBY PORTER D.D. and GEORGE STINTON D.D.

His Grace's Chaplains.

V O L. V.

L O N D O N,

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M D C C L X X I.

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE Editors think it necessary to signify, that the three Volumes of Sermons, now offered to the Public, are the last of Archbishop SECKER'S Works, which they intend to print. Of these, the fifth and seventh consist of miscellaneous Sermons, not at all inferior, as they conceive, to the former Volumes. The sixth contains a Series of Discourses, *on Scripture, on the English Liturgy, and against Popery*; some of which they once doubted whether it would be advisable to make public. But several of the Author's Friends, who had heard them preached, and received great Satisfaction from them, were extremely desirous to have them all collected into one Volume, and added to the two others. This induced the Editors not only to give these Discourses a second and more careful Examination, but to submit them to the Perusal of a Person of high Rank in the Church and acknowledged Abilities, who thought them much too useful and instructive

to be suppressed : especially as both the Nature of the Subjects, and the Manner of treating them, gave them some Affinity to the *Lectures on the Church Catechism*. On these Grounds, the Editors now give them to the World ; and have little Doubt but that these concluding Volumes will meet with the same Approbation which the preceding ones have received from all Ranks of People.

It may be proper to add, that the *nine Sermons*, on the War and Rebellion, published in the Year 1758, by the Author himself when he was Bishop of *Oxford*, which were out of Print, and much sought after, are now reprinted, by the Booksellers, with the Addition of the *Answer to Dr. Mayhew*, and the *Letter to Mr. Horace Walpole*. This Volume, together with the fourteen *occasional Sermons*, printed by his Grace in 1766, the two Volumes of *Lectures on the Church Catechism*, one of *Charges*, &c. and seven of *Sermons*, published since his Death, complete his Grace's Works in twelve Volumes *Octavo*.

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S E R M O N I.

MATTH. xxviii. 19, 20.

Go ye therefore, and teach all Nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost :

Teaching them to observe all Things, whatsoever I have commanded you : and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the End of the World. Amen.

TH E S E Words contain that great Commiffion and Charter, granted by our Saviour to his Apostles and their Successors, by Virtue of which we and all Mankind have been called to the Knowledge and Practice of true Religion, inforced by the Motives of eternal Felicity or Misery. As it had been chiefly in *Galilee*, that he instructed his Disciples before his Death: so he appointed them to retire thither after his Resurrection,

that he might add to his Instructions whatever then became proper ; and more fully acquaint them with such Things, as *pertained to the Kingdom of God* ^a. There, our Evangelist informs us, he appeared to them on a Mountain : perhaps the same, on which he had begun to open the Doctrine of Christianity, in that noble Discourse, which we have in the Fifth and following Chapters of this Gospel ; and given them a Specimen of his and their future Glory, at his Transfiguration ^b. *When they saw him*, the Generality immediately worshipped him : but *some*, we are told with the usual Fairness of the sacred Writers, *doubted* ^c. Whether these were only Persons, who accompanied the Apostles, and had not yet seen him since he rose again : or whether some of the Apostles themselves, who might not with Certainty know him at a Distance, is not clear. But the Doubts of either could not but vanish, when *Jesus came up* to them, as St. *Matthew* assures us he did, for so the original Word signifies ^d, and conversed familiarly with them. Many such Conversations he held with these his Followers : for St.

^a Acts i. 3. ^b Grot. in Loc. faith, There is ancient Tradition for the last. See Reland Palest. p. 334, &c.

^c v. 17. ^d Πρὸς ἑαυτὸν, v. 18.

Luke in their Acts informs us, that they continued *Forty Days* ^c. But the Substance of them all must be, what the Text expresses : where, in Consequence of that Fulness of *Power*, which he tells them, in the foregoing Words, was *given him* over all Things *in Heaven and in Earth*; as *the Father had sent Him, He sends Them* ^f, to *make Disciples*, for that is the more accurate Rendering ^g, not of the Jews alone, but of *all Nations*. And that they may do it rightly and effectually, he distinctly sets forth,

- I. The Doctrines, they were to teach.
- II. The Duties, they were to enjoin.
- III. The Protection and Happiness, of which they might assure, both themselves, and all those, who faithfully preached his Gospel, and who sincerely embraced it.

I. The Doctrines, they were to teach. These are briefly, but sufficiently, comprehended in the Direction of *baptizing Men in the Name*

^c Acts i. 3.

^f John xx. 21.

^g Μαθητευω is not used in the Septuagint: nor Μαθητης. In the New Testament it is found thrice, besides the Text: and signifies to make Disciples, Acts xiv. 21. to be a Disciple, Matth. xxvii. 57. and in the passive Voice may signify, to be made a Disciple, Matth. xiii. 52. It signifies also in Plutarch, to be a Disciple. See Steph. in Voc.

of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: for the better understanding of which Phrase, it will be proper to explain,

1. What is meant by being *baptized in the Name* of any one, and particularly of these three.

2. What is the Faith in these three, which our Baptism requires us to profess.

1. For the completer Apprehension of the former of these Points, it will be useful to observe, that in our Saviour's Days, it had been an ancient Custom amongst the Jews, when any Gentile forsook Idolatry, and believed the Law of *Moses*, to receive him into their Religion, amongst other Ceremonies, by Baptism: as indeed they had themselves been prepared for the Reception of that Law, by a solemn and religious Washing, as we read Exod. xix. Nay even the Heathens made use of Purifications by Water, when they initiated, or entered, any one into the Mysteries of their Deities. And this Rite being not only thus universally used, but also naturally expressive of those two Things, which, on professing Christianity, chiefly wanted to be expressed: a Promise, on our Part, carefully to preserve ourselves pure, from the Defilement of Sin, through

through the Assistance of the Holy Spirit ; and a Promise, on God's Part, graciously to consider us, as pure from the Guilt of it, through the Merits of his Son : therefore our blessed Lord condescended to make this the Form of entering into his Religion also. But at the same Time, he thoroughly distinguished the Christian Baptism, both from that of the Heathens, who were baptized into Superstitions and idolatrous Follies ; and from that of the Jewish Profelytes, who were baptized, as the Apostle expresses it, into *Moses*^h, by directing, that His Followers should be *baptized in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost*.

In the Language of Scripture, Doing any Thing in the Name of God, signifies Doing it by Virtue of his Authority. Thus our Saviour saith to the Jews, *I am come in my Father's Name, and ye receive me not : If another shall come in his own Name, Him ye will receive*ⁱ. In this Sense Baptism is administered in the Name of the Holy Trinity, being a divine Appointment, with a distinct Reference to each of the three Persons. And in this Sense the Phrase appears to have been used by

^h 1 Cor. x. 2.ⁱ John v. 43.

St. *Peter*, when he *commanded* the Family of *Cornelius* to be baptized in the Name of the Lord^k: that is, by Virtue of his Commission to baptize all Nations. Till that Day, the Apostles had understood this only concerning Jews and Profelytes of all Nations. But now, St. *Peter* being sent by exprefs Revelation to *Cornelius*, a Gentile; and perceiving, in the Midst of his Discourse to Him and his Friends, that, on their believing, *the Holy Ghost was fallen upon them*^l, Gentiles as they were: after some Astonishment, he argues very justly, *Can any Man forbid Water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost, as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the Name of the Lord*^m: that is, in pursuance of our Saviour's general Direction.

But though the Expression in the Text undoubtedly implies this Meaning, yet it comprehends a further one. For the Phrase translated IN *the Name*, is different from that in the Passage relating to St. *Peter*, and signifies in Strictness, INTO *the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost*: which Word, *into*, the New

^k Act. x. 48.^l v. 44.^m v. 47, 48.

Testament uses nine Times besides ⁿ, in speaking of Baptism, whereas it uses a Word signifying, *in*, at most, but once besides ^o. The particular Import of this Term, I shall now explain to you.

It hath ever been usual, that the Believers or Professors of any Doctrine should be called by a Name, derived from the first or chief Teacher of that Doctrine. And by whatever Form or Ceremony they declared themselves his Disciples, by the same they were understood to

ⁿ Acts viii. 16. xix. 3, 5. Rom. vi. 3. 1 Cor. i. 13, 15. x. 2. xii. 13. Gal. iii. 27.

^o Acts ii. 38; where the Preposition is *ἐπι*. Now, *ἐπι τῷ ὀνόματι* appears to signify the same thing as *ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι*. Matth xxiv. 5. Mark ix. 39, xiii. 6. Luke ix. 49, xxi. 8. Acts iv. 18, v. 28, 40. *ἐπι τῷ ὀνόματι* signifies also *for the Sake of*, or *from Regard to*; Matth. xviii. 5. Mark ix. 37. Luke ix. 48; and so doth *εἰς τὸ ὄνομα*, Matth. x. 41, 42; as doth *לשם*. Thus the Samaritans circumcised their Children *לשם הר גריזים* into the Name of Mount Gerizim. Avoda Sara, Fol. 27.1. in Schoetg. Hor. Heb. in Matth. xxviii, 20; i. e. *devoted him to the Worship there instituted*; of which Schwarzius, in his *Exercitationes in Pent. Sam.* Witemb. 1756, p. 51, saith the Explanation is (As he cites it from the Talmudical Book, *כסכת חולין* Edzardi Ed. Hamb. 1710, p. 42) that they circumcised them *לשם דמית בראש הר גריזים ועובריו* *לה עבודה* in or into the Name of the Image on the Top of Mount Gerizim, which Image they worship, and circumcise their Children *לשם היונה זה* in, or into, the Name of this Dove. The only Places where the Phrase *εἰς τὸ ὄνομα* occurs besides, are, John i. 12, ii. 23, iii. 18, 1 John v. 13; where the Phrase is *πιστεύουσιν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα*; and Matth. xviii. 20. *στυγόμενοι εἰς τὸ ἔμνομα ὀνόμα*. Here some understand it, *for my Sake*, others *to pray in my Name*, others *by Virtue of my Command*.

take upon them his Name. Thus the Jews, when, taking *Moses* for their Prophet and Guide, they followed him into the Midst of the Red Sea, are said by St. *Paul*, in Allusion to the Water through which they passed, to have been *baptized into Moses* ^r: which is equivalent to saying, that they were baptized into the Name of *Moses*. Not that in Fact the Jews called themselves by his Name, as the several Sects of Philosophers did by the Names of their several Leaders. For the Doctrine, which *Moses* taught, was not his own: and the Obedience, which he required, was not to himself; but to God, the Maker of Heaven and Earth. And therefore, when the Jews were thus baptized into *Moses*, they were at the same Time, in a much higher Sense, baptized into the Name of God: taking that upon them, as an Acknowledgement of their being His: for Servants are known by the Name of their Lord. In Scripture therefore God himself styles them, *My People, which are called by my Name* ^q. And they plead with him, *We are called by thy Name, leave us not* ^r: and elsewhere declare, *All People will walk every one*

^p 1 Cor. x. 2. ^q 2 Chr. vii. 14. ^r Jer. xiv. 9.
In the Hebrew it is, *Thy Name is called over us.*

in the Name of his God : and we will walk in the Name of the Lord our God for ever and ever ^s. As then the Moabites were called by the Name of their God, the People of *Che-mosh* ^t ; and the other idolatrous Nations in like Manner ; so were the Israelites called by the Name of the true God. And whoever by Baptism, amongst other Ceremonies, professed himself a Convert to Judaism, he was, properly speaking, baptized into the same Name.

When therefore the Christian Religion was published ; as Profelytes to the old Dispensation had been baptized into *Moses*, taking Him for their Lawgiver and Instructor : so Believers in the New were baptized into Christ, receiving Him for their Lord and Master. And as the former were in Effect baptized into the Name of the one true God, assuming the Denomination of his Servants : so the latter, being more fully instructed concerning the Object of Worship, were professedly and in Form *baptized into the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost* : taking this Name upon them, to believe in and obey for the future, as their Badge of Distinction from all other Men. Whence our Saviour, in his

^s Mic. iv. 5.

^t Numb. xxi. 29. Jer. xlviii. 46.

Prayer for his Disciples, saith to the Father, *While I was with them in the World, I kept them in thy Name: Holy Father, keep through thine own Name those whom thou hast given me* ^u. And in his Exhortation to the Angel of the Church of Pergamos, he saith, *Thou holdest fast my Name, and hast not denied my Faith* ^w.

It must be acknowledged indeed, that being baptized into the Name of these three, is no where expressly mentioned, except in the Text. But then the more usual Phrase, of being baptized into Christ, or into His Name, amounts to just the same Thing. For by bearing the Name of Christians, we declare ourselves Believers, not in Christ alone; but in the Father, *of whom*, to use the Apostle's Words, *the whole Family in Heaven and Earth is named* ^x; and in the Holy Spirit also: whose Name appears evidently never to have been omitted in Baptism, from that remarkable Passage ^y, where some Professors of the Gospel owning that they were intirely ignorant concerning the Holy Ghost, St. Paul asks them, *Unto what then were ye baptized?* And finding it was only *into the Baptism of John*, commands them to

^u John xvii. 11, 12.

^w Rev ii. 23.

^x Eph. iii. 15.

^y Acts xix. 1, 2, 3.

be now baptized, *into the Name of the Lord Jesus*². So it is expressed : but the foregoing Question fully proves, that the Name of the Holy Ghost was used likewise : from whence it follows, that the Expression, *baptizing into the Name of Christ*, wherever we find it in Scripture, is only put for Shortness : and that the original Form of Baptism was, *In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost* : which accordingly was the constant one in the primitive Church.

You see then, upon the whole, that as being *baptized into John's* Baptism, was taking his Name, and being called his Disciple : and as being *baptized into the Name of Paul*, (a Supposition, which he himself puts³) would have been setting Him up as our chief Leader and Master : so when the Scripture speaks of being *baptized into the Name of Christ*, the Meaning is, that we avow believing and following Him ; and when, more fully, *into the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost*, it signifies, that we are received into the Number of those, who profess, and desire to be known by the Character of

² V. 3, 4, 5.³ 1 Cor. i. 13.

professing, Faith and Duty towards the ever-blessed Trinity.

2. But wherein more particularly this Faith, which is the Foundation of Duty, consists; and what are the great Articles of it, is the second Point, on which I proposed to speak: and these Things not being explicitly taught in the Form of Baptism singly, must be learned from the rest of Scripture in Conjunction with it, and professed in Proportion as they are learned. Now the Scripture expressly asserts, in perfect Conformity with Reason, that there is but one God, the Object of our Faith and Adoration: not one supreme, and other inferior ones, as the Heathens believed, but one alone. *Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord^b: Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve^c. I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God besides me^d: I am the Lord, that is my Name, and my Glory will I not give to another^e*, saith he himself. Accordingly St. Paul declares, that *to us Christians, there is one God the Father, of whom are all Things^f*. But then, besides the several Orders of created Beings, the same

^b Deut. vi. 4. ^c Deut. vi. 13. Matth. iv. 4. ^d Is. xlv. 5.
^e Is. xlvii. 8. ^f 1 Cor. viii. 6.

Scripture as expressly mentions his eternal Son and Spirit: the one begotten of him, the other proceeding from him. The distinct and full Meaning of these Terms we know not: but this, however, they plainly denote, that the Son and Spirit are derived from the Father, in a Manner, whatever it be, each different from the other, and both different from Creation. Accordingly we find ascribed to both these, not only the Names, but the Perfections of God, with Honours and Worship incommunicable to any Creature: and while they are evidently distinguished from the Father, they are as evidently described as being one with him. Wherein precisely this Union and this Distinction lies, the Scripture hath not said, and therefore we cannot say, any farther than this: that the Union appears to be, not only a Similitude of Will, or of other Powers and Dispositions, but the highest possible Sameness of essential Attributes and Properties; for which Reason it hath been called an Unity of Essence, Nature or Substance: and the Distinction appears to be, not only a Difference of Names, or of Relations to created Beings, but of Subsistence and Action, resembling in some Measure, as described

described in Holy Writ, that of different human Agents ; on which Account it is said to be a Distinction of Persons. And from all these Things put together, we conclude, that we are to believe and worship three Persons, who are one God.

Many other Words and Terms there are, besides these, which have been used in speaking of this great Mystery : some of them proper and useful, serving to express only what the Scripture expresses, and to guard it against Misrepresentations ; which therefore we should ever interpret candidly and favourably : others, much better omitted ; as indeed all are, that Men employ to give any further Knowledge of the Subject, than God hath given. For in such Cases, but in this above any, the true Method is, to receive, with the utmost Humility and Simplicity of Mind, what is revealed : neither adding, nor diminishing, nor one Way or other attempting to make it, either clearer, or darker, than it is. The former we cannot do : the latter we easily may, but surely should not wish to do. Multiplying therefore Phrases and Reasonings, either to determine what the divine Oracles have not determined, or to explain away what they

have determined, is on both Hands wrong ; and hath often led very great Men into unhappy Errors, and very good Men into fierce Contentions : all which might be avoided, would they but be so modest, as neither to doubt of what the All-wise hath taught, nor pry into what he hath concealed ; and so charitable, as never without the strongest Reason to think ill of others, and never for any Reason do or wish ill to them.

There are certainly, in this wonderful Doctrine, many Things, concerning which, Questions may be asked, which we can only answer by confessing our Ignorance : and some Things, against which Objections may be raised, that we can solve no otherwise, than by reminding those, who make them, that such Difficulties must be expected, whenever a finite Mind attempts to view an infinite Object. But, though, in the Holy Trinity, there is much, that can by no Means be comprehended fully ; which is what we intend to say, by calling it *mysterious*, or above Reason ; (as indeed almost every Thing is, in Part, above ours :) yet, in what the Scripture requires us to believe concerning the Holy Trinity, there is nothing, which either cannot be at all understood ; or
which

which, when understood, is absurd and contrary to Reason. Now whatever possibly may be true, we are bound, when a Revelation, well attested, plainly teaches it, to believe actually is true. For Faith in what God affirms, is unquestionably as necessary, as Obedience to what he enjoins. And, little as we can see in Matters of this high Nature, we may notwithstanding sufficiently see very important Motives for his Injunction of Faith in this Doctrine: because from the Distinction of Persons in the Trinity, there arises a farther Distinction of their Relations to us, on which Relations are founded distinct Duties on our Parts towards them; and very different from what they would be, if two of them were only Creatures of exalted Rank. The whole Substance of Christianity is comprehended in considering, and accordingly honouring, (to express it in the well-known Words of our Catechism) *God the Father*, as Him, *who hath made us and all the World*; *God the Son*, as Him, *who hath redeemed us and all Mankind*; *God the Holy Ghost*, as Him, *who sanctifieth us and all the elect People of God*. Not but that each Person concurs in each of these Works: but still, finding in Scripture,

that one is represented as more peculiarly and eminently concerned in one of them, and another in another ; we justly distinguish the Father, Son, and Spirit, by the distinct Offices of Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier ; and justly express the Distinction in our Prayers and Praises, as well as in our Creed.

Thus, in the Revelation of St. *John*, the Saints above adore the Person of the Father in the first of these Characters. *And the four and twenty Elders fell down before him that sat on the Throne, and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever,—saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive Glory, and Honour, and Power : for thou hast created all Things ; and for thy Pleasure they are, and were created &c.* We therefore on Earth, in like Manner, ought to worship, and fall down, and kneel before the Lord our Maker^h : to whom we farther owe peculiar Thanksgivings on this Account, that he, according to the Counsel of infinite Wisdom, was the original Cause of our Redemption. For in this was manifested the Love of God towards us, that he sent his only-begotten Son into the World, that we might live through Himⁱ. Blessed be the God and Father of our

^g Rev. iv. 10, 11.^h Ps. xcv. 6.ⁱ 1 John iv. 9.

Lord Jesus Christ, which, according to his abundant Mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively Hope^k. But the actual Accomplishment of this great Design was the unspeakably gracious Work of the second Person, whom therefore we call our Redeemer, and address with Devotions appropriated to his Office. Thus, in the very next Chapter of the same Book of Revelation, we are told by St. John: The four and twenty Elders fell down before the Lamb, and sung a new Song, saying, Thou art worthy—for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy Blood, out of every Kindred, and Tongue, and People, and Nation.—And I heard the Voice of many Angels round about the Throne,—saying with a loud Voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive Power, and Riches, and Wisdom, and Strength, and Honour, and Glory, and Blessing. And every Creature, which is in Heaven, and on the Earth, and under the Earth, heard I, saying, Blessing, and Honour, and Glory, and Power, be unto him, that sitteth upon the Throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever^l. In this universal Acclamation of Praise, our Hearts ought to join with the humblest Gratitude: to reverence him

^k 1 Pet. i. 3.^l Rev. v. 8, 9, 11, 12, 13.

continually

continually as the *Lord of all*^m; and in particular, besides the holy Ordinance of Baptism, to celebrate with the devoutest Affection, that other solemn Rite, which he hath instituted, commanding us, *This do in Remembrance of me*ⁿ. The distinct Office of the third Person, the Spirit, hath consisted from the Beginning, first in revealing and confirming the Truths of Religion to Men, from Age to Age, till the Knowledge of them was completed in the New Testament; for *holy Men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost*^o: then in disposing their Minds, by the outward Ministry of the Word, and the inward Workings of his Grace, to receive and obey them: giving those, who comply with his Motions, Strength against Temptation, Comfort under Affliction, Fervency in Prayer, Growth in Goodness, reviving Hope, and sometimes joyful Assurance, of divine Favour: All which Operations tending wholly to improve us in Piety and Virtue, which together make up true Sanctity or Holiness, he is accordingly styled the Sanctifier. And our Duty to him plainly is, to be thankful to him for what he hath done, and pray for what he is ready to

^m Acts x. 36.ⁿ Luke xxii. 19.^o 2 Pet. i. 21.

do, towards our Salvation ; never to *grieve* ^p
or do despite to ^a *him* by wilful Sin or Negli-
 gence ; but to learn from his Instructions, and
 yield to his Influences, that he may abide with
 us for ever, and make us, as the Apostle ex-
 presses himself, *Temples of the Holy Ghost* ^r.

^p Eph. iv. 30.^a Heb. x. 29.^r 1 Cor. vi. 19.

S E R M O N II.

MATTH. xxviii. 19, 20.

Go ye therefore, and teach all Nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Teaching them to observe all Things, whatsoever I have commanded you : and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the End of the World. Amen.

IN my former Discourse on these Words I have shewn both what is meant by being baptized *in*, or rather *into the Name* of any one, particularly of *the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost*; and what Faith in them that Baptism obliges us to profess : endeavouring so to set forth our Christian Belief, as neither to decide concerning what is hidden from us, nor to omit what is made known to us. For *the secret Things*

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belong

belong unto the Lord our God: but those Things, which are revealed, belong unto us and to our Children for ever; that we may do all the Words of this Law^a. Let us now therefore go on to the practical Part of Christianity, comprehended under the

Second Branch of the Text, in which our Saviour directs his Apostles, what Duties they were to enjoin Men, in Consequence of their Faith. *Teaching them to observe all Things, whatsoever I have commanded you.*

Now of these, our Duties to the several Persons of the Holy Trinity are so closely connected with our Faith in them, that I thought it most natural to mention them together. And of the rest, it would be impossible at present to specify every one in particular. And therefore I shall only treat of the more general Heads and Divisions of them. By this Commission of our blessed Lord then, the Ministers of the Gospel are bound to teach, and the Professors of the Gospel to observe, the Precepts of Piety, as well as Morality; of revealed Religion, as well as natural; difficult, as well as easy Duties; those of Self-Government, as well

as of social Behaviour ; *all Things whatsoever be bath commanded*, and nothing else.

I. Precepts of Piety, as well as Morality. In some Ages of the World the Generality of Persons, and in all too many, have almost intirely disregarded Virtue, at least some Parts of it, while yet they seemed very zealous in Religion. That the *Religion* of such is *vain*^b, requires little Proof. Indeed it must be, either mere Pretence, or gross Mistake. Either they have really none of that Devotion, which they profess, or it is Devotion to an *unknown God*. For did they at all apprehend his Nature aright; the Love of him could not but incline them to the Love of whatever was good ; and the Fear of him could not but deter them from whatever was evil. These Things are so easily demonstrable, and the Mischiefs of not attending to them have been so dreadful ; that wherever Knowledge and Liberty have prevailed, such wrong Notions of Duty to our Maker have (amongst the more considerable Part of the World at least,) quickly fallen into the Contempt and Hatred, which they well deserve. But then, as it is natural for the Warmth of Men to carry them too far; and

^b James i. 26.

^c Acts xvii. 23.

the Thoughtlessness of Men to confound Matters, which should be distinguished : so, in our Times, most unhappily, Multitudes have run from one Extreme to another ; and, not discerning the Difference between two of the unlikest Things in the World, when well compared, false Religion and true, have, in a great Measure, if not absolutely, rejected both together. Declaring in general the highest Honour for Virtue, they slight and even ridicule Piety : the inward Feeling of it, under the Name of Enthusiasm ; the outward Marks of it, under that of Superstition. Yet plainly, if Sentiments of Duty and Affection to our Fellow-Creatures be necessary Ingredients in a good Character : Want of them towards our Creator, must (where Means of Instruction are afforded) be a certain Argument of a bad one. And, if our Regards to our Fellow-Creatures ought to be shewn by visible Tokens, not only that they may be sensible of our proper Dispositions, but that by exercising them we may improve in them, and others be excited to Imitation : then our Reverence to our Creator ought likewise to be manifested openly ; because, though he sees the devout Thoughts, that lie hid in our Hearts, yet, by expressing them, we shall
both

both strengthen them in ourselves, and set an useful Example to those around us. Indeed the Connection of religious Duties with moral is so very close, that, as the Religion of those is always false, who think meanly of Virtue: so the Virtue of those is never uniformly, if at all, true, who think meanly of Religion. For the Belief of a God, who observes and will recompense, being in all Cases the greatest, and in some the only, Support of right Conduct: they, who either disbelieve or disregard him, must frequently fall into wrong Conduct, amidst the various Temptations of Life. And the Truth is, the Generality of those amongst them, who talk the most of Virtue, appear to concern themselves very little farther about it, than to oppose it, in their Talk, to Religion. Such indeed cannot be really, in any Degree, serious. But many who, in some Respects, are such, and imagine they are in all, would assuredly find, on a careful Examination, that they are dangerously deficient in this Respect: and that cultivating and exerting dutiful Affection to the Author of their Being, is not only in itself *the first and great Commandment*, but hath a most powerful Influence on the Practice of that

second,

second, which is *like unto it* ^d, and of every other human Obligation.

II. We are bound to observe the Precepts of revealed Religion, as well as natural. That God can make known to us many Truths, of which we were ignorant, though greatly interested in them, will not surely be doubted : for we can make known such very often one to another. And that from these Truths corresponding Rules of Behaviour may flow, is equally plain. Those Relations and Duties therefore to our Redeemer and to our Sanctifier, which the holy Scripture alone discovers to us, are not, on that Account, at all the less real, than those to our Creator, of which Reason informs us. Further : as God is the Sovereign of the World, there is no more Room for Question, whether, under the general Laws of his moral Kingdom, he may not establish, from Time to Time, particular and different Institutions and Forms of Religion ; than whether, under the general Laws of human Society, earthly Sovereigns may not establish particular and different Institutions and Forms of Government. And lastly : As God knows perfectly well, both the Nature of our Circum-

^d Matth. xxii. 37. &c.

stances, and the proper Method of treating us ; that he may possibly have very important Motives for some of his Appointments, of which Motives we can discern scarce any thing, is much more certain, than that a wise Man, well acquainted with any Affair, may perceive many Steps to be fitting in Relation to it, which a weak Man, uninstructed in it, doth not.

Whatever Precepts then are contained in Revelation, since none of them, rightly understood, are contrary to Reason, it is our indispensable Duty to observe them, though ever so implicitly, *walking in all the Commandments and Ordinances of the Lord blameless* *. We know not what we do, when we reject or slight any one of them : only this we know, that we disobey that Authority, which enjoins the Whole : a Consideration, worthy of being laid seriously to Heart by all those, (for too many there are,) who, either presumptuously, or thoughtlessly, neglect or depreciate some of the Institutions of Christianity, while they profess to reverence others ; and, as any Shadow of Argument, or groundless Imagination leads them, determine with themselves, that This they will do, That they will not ; This they

* Luke i. 6.

will look on as a Matter of Moment, That as a Trifle. It cannot be, that any of the Laws of Christ, our Lord and Master, are to be treated thus. And yet some of them are treated thus by such Numbers, (who, notwithstanding, call themselves by his Name,) that they must be mentioned in particular.

The Sacrament of Baptism, the leading Part of our Saviour's Commission in the Text, is not indeed thrown off, but frequently attended with scarce common Seriousness. The Obligation of Parents and Masters to *bring up* those under their Care *in the Nurture and Admonition of the Lord*¹, is both cruelly and unwisely forgotten. The apostolical and very useful Ordinance of Confirmation, is too often omitted, and still oftener considered as an empty Form : private Devotion practised, it may be feared, by very few, at least with any Attention : pious Reading and Meditation by fewer still : Family Prayer almost intirely laid aside : and the public Service of God, by some avowedly scorned, by others, both thought and spoken of with a contemptuous Indifference ; as if it might well be left to Fancy and Chance, when and how often, or whether almost at all, they should

¹ Eph. vi. 4.

condescend to join in that Worship of him who made them, which himself hath prescribed. The Day, which he hath directed to be kept holy, is lamentably, and in many Places openly, profaned, not only by the Omission just mentioned, but by needless worldly Business, improper Diversions, and what is yet worse, Intemperance and Debauchery. Nay, the far greater Part, even of such, as observe other Institutions with no small Appearance of Conscientiousness, astonishingly overlook, in Spite of continual Admonitions, their Saviour's Injunction of commemorating, at the Holy Table, his dying Love, delivered nearly with his dying Breath. Experience hath proved to a shocking Degree, that in Proportion as Disregard to Duties, peculiarly Christian, increases, Disregard to all Duty increases too: and what the End of it will be (unless through God's Grace our timely Reformation put a happy End to it) I know not how we can better judge, than by our blessed Lord's own Words, which he hath verified so dreadfully on those once shining Lights, the Churches of *Asia*, to whom they were primarily directed. *Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first*

first Works : else I will come unto thee quickly, and remove thy Candlestick out of its Place, except thou repent ².

III. Being bound to whatever Christ hath commanded us, we are bound to perform the most laborious and unwelcome, as well as the easiest, of his Commands. We may be sure, he hath enjoined us nothing, but what he will make possible, nothing but what he hath a Right, nothing but what he hath Cause, to enjoin. And therefore, the Difficulty of his Precepts can never be an Excuse for not obeying them. Sometimes this Difficulty is but imaginary : and what we apprehend that we cannot do at all, would we but try in a proper Manner, we should do with great Ease. Sometimes it is real indeed, but of our own creating. Slight Inclinations have grown, by Indulgence or Negligence, into settled Habits : wilful wrong Conduct hath put Obstacles in the Way of acting right : and then we think it very grievous, that we must be at Pains to bring ourselves out of a Condition, that we needed never have brought ourselves into. Or, supposing any Virtue originally hard to practise, do we not often obey extremely hard In-

junctions of Men? And why not therefore those of God? Be the Labour ever so great; still, both in the Nature of the Thing, and by the Appointment of Heaven, no one can become happy, that doth not become good: and no one is truly good, who purposely or negligently lives in the Omission of any Duty, or Commission of any Sin. Difficulty is a Reason for nothing, but exerting ourselves, and applying to God for Help: which whoever doth in earnest, will find Opposition serve only to strengthen his Christian Graces by Exercise here, and augment the Reward of them for ever hereafter.

IV. We must observe those Commands, which relate to the Government of ourselves, no less than those which respect our Fellow-Creatures. Men are strangely apt to run into Extremes in this Particular. Some, on the Merit of their Abstinence from unlawful Pleasures, venture without Scruple to be ill-humoured, hard-hearted, censorious, and unjust; while some again place the whole of a right Character in a gay Kind of good Nature: and, either hurting, as they pretend, Nobody but themselves; or, however doing others only such Injuries, as they imagine Matter of Merriment; go almost

almost whatever Lengths of sensual Gratification their Desires prompt them to. Now these latter, far from being the harmless People, which they would have the World think them, usually contribute more, by the unavoidable, and often foreseen, Consequences of their Vices, and the Contagion of their Examples, to bring Misery into private Life, and Distress, if not Ruin, upon the Public, than almost any wicked Persons, that can be mentioned besides. But were they, in these Respects, ever so innocent: yet our being rational Creatures, as indispensably binds us to Sobriety, Chastity, and Decency, as our being social Creatures doth to Inoffensiveness and Beneficence. A Mind immersed in Voluptuousness, nay filled with Amusements and Trifles, and attentive to them only or chiefly, is by no Means in a moral State, and much less in a religious one. Our evident Capacity and Formation for higher and better Things, cannot but carry with it a proportionable Obligation, to the Improvement of our Understandings in the Knowledge of Truth, and of our Hearts in the Esteem of Virtue; to the Care of acting worthily and usefully amongst our Fellow-Creatures, and qualifying ourselves for
 spiritual

spiritual Happiness with our Creator. Thus much even the Light of Nature will teach us. And if Revelation be consulted ; there we shall find the strongest Cautions, against that Fondness for sumptuous Living, Delicacy, and Splendor, which brought the rich Man into the Place of Torment ^a ; against being *Lovers of Pleasures, more than Lovers of God* ⁱ. Scriptures, like these, are not designed to drive Persons into unnatural Rigours and Austerities : but they are designed to restrain them from that Habit and Study of Self-Indulgence, which being attended perhaps with the Commission of no flagrant Sins, looks to be an allowable Way of consuming Time ; but indeed brings poor Wretches, often by quick Degrees, to intire Forgetfulness of God and themselves, and extinguishes all Attention to what deserves it most. This Lethargy of the Mind is the great Danger of a State of Prosperity and Affluence : which therefore, as many as are placed in that State, should continually watch against, as being totally contrary to a Spirit of Religion ; and remember, that whoever so *liveth in Pleasure, as to live to it, is dead while he liveth* ^k :

^a Luke xvi. 19, &c.ⁱ 2 Tim. iii. 4.^k 1 Tim. v. 6.

dead to all the Purposes of Christianity here, and all the Hopes of Felicity hereafter.

V. Our Saviour's Direction, that all Nations be *taught to observe* every thing *which he hath commanded*, implies a Prohibition of teaching any thing in his Name, which he hath not commanded, either personally while on Earth, or by the holy Spirit of Truth after his Ascension. For where his Commission ends, there the Powers of those, to whom he gave it, end also. Still, in Matters left undetermined, or not fully determined by him, Men of Knowledge may signify their Opinion, Men of Prudence may suggest their Advice, and both are to be regarded in a proper Degree. Superiors may likewise interpose their Authority, so far as public Order and Peace require; and, in all Things lawful, others are bound to submit to them. But no Man, or Number of Men, may presume to set up their own Judgement, or their own Will, for a Law of Christ: or add a single Article, as a necessary one, to that Rule of *Faith* and Practice, which was *once delivered unto the Saints*¹. Even St. Paul himself hath on one Occasion accurately distinguished be-

¹ Jude v. 3.

tween what he, and what the Lord in Person, spoke ^m; between Points in which he *had* an express *Commandment*, and Points in which he *gave his Judgement*, as one that had obtained Mercy to be faithful ⁿ: that is, in the Trust of the Apostleship. And if such a Person was thus careful, much more ought the Ministers of Religion in these later Ages, who can have no certain Acquaintance with it, but from his Writings and the rest of Scripture, be solicitous not to *preach any other Gospel, than that they have received* ^o; nor *build, on the Foundation of Jesus Christ*, Superstructures that will not abide the Trial ^p, *teaching for Doctrines the Commandments of Men* ^q. They, who assume this Power, usurp a Dominion over their Fellow-Servants, to which only their Master in Heaven hath a Right: and they who obey this Power, so far *worship God in vain, who hath never required this at their Hands* ^r.

I have now gone through the second Part of the Text: the Duties, which the Apostles and their Successors were to enjoin. And therefore I proceed to set before you,

III. The Protection and Happiness, of which

^m 1 Cor. vii. 10. 12.
^p 1 Cor. iii. 11, 12, 13.

ⁿ v. 25.
^q Matth. xv. 9.

^o Gal. i. 9.
^r If. i. 12.

both they who faithfully preach the Gospel, and they who sincerely embrace it, may be assured. *Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the End of the World. Amen.*

Amongst Men, chusing to be with any one is not only a natural Consequence of having a Regard for him, but, on many important Occasions, a necessary Means of shewing that Regard to his Advantage. In Condescension therefore to common Language, God, though present every where, is described in holy Writ as peculiarly drawing nigh unto, being, and dwelling with, those, who by a Temper and Conduct of Piety and Virtue intitle themselves to his Love and fatherly Care: whereas he is represented as departing from Persons of a contrary Character, not vouchsafing to look upon them, or beholding them afar off, till he returns to execute Judgement on them. Of this Kind is the Manner of Speech used in the Text: where our blessed Lord, being about to leave the World, and go unto the Father, tells his Followers, that though his visible and bodily Presence was to be withdrawn very soon, he should be still as really present upon Earth, as ever: not only seeing, but watching, directing, and defending them continually. And therefore,

fore, notwithstanding St. *Matthew* thought fit to abstain from subjoining in his Gospel any Words of his own to these most solemn ones of our Saviour, yet his Ascent into Heaven is almost as well understood by them, as if it had been expressly related.

This gracious Promise was doubtless immediately, and in the first Place, made to the Apostles. But as the Use, for which it was made, is perpetual ; and the Term, for which it is expressed to be made, cannot possibly be confined to themselves; but must signify either, as we translate it, *to the End of the World*, or *to the End of the Gospel Age*, which is to last as long as the World ; it must necessarily be extended to those, who should at any Time succeed the Apostles in teaching the Faith and Duties of Christianity. And since the Presence of Christ with the Teachers of his Religion is designed for the Benefit of those, who are taught it : therefore all such, in all Ages, have a Share in the Assurance of the Text. Accordingly, in many Places of Scripture, the Presence, not only of the Son of God, but of the Father and Holy Spirit, is promised to every true Believer without Exception. St. *Paul* declares, *If any Man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is*

none of his *. *And Christ himself declares, If a Man love me,—my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our Abode with him* †.

If then, as the Church of *Rome* pretends, such Expressions as these convey a Promise of Infallibility, or Security of not departing from the right Faith, to their Church, or any Person or Persons in it; they convey the same to every Church, and every Person in it. But our Saviour's Declaration is, not that any one or more Churches may not, if they will, intirely throw off the Faith; and even all Churches, as well as all Men, fall both into many Errors and many Sins: but that this shall never happen through his forsaking them, but their forsaking him: and that, how great soever the Apostacy of the latter Times may be, (as *St. Paul* hath foretold it should be a very grievous one ‡;) how much soever at any Time the Church of Christ may be obscured, it shall never be extinguished: for it must continue to the End of the World, since he hath promised to *be with it* to the End of the World. In different Ages he is present to it in different Manners, as the Circumstances of

* Rom. viii. 9.

† John xiv. 23.

‡ Tim. iv. 1.

each require. His Apostles he directed by Inspiration into all Truth : and strengthened them with Power to work Miracles in Confirmation of it. When Religion, by their Means, was known and proved sufficiently, these extraordinary Effects of his Presence gradually ceased : but those, which remained still needful, were still experienced. And to this Day, wherever his Ministers teach Men to believe and do what he hath commanded, there *he is alway with them* : and *wherever two or three of his Disciples are gathered together in his Name, there he is in the Midst of them*^w : protecting his whole Church, and every Member of it, outwardly against their temporal Enemies to such Degree, as infinite Wisdom sees to be fit ; and inwardly against their spiritual ones, so that nothing, but their own wilful Sins and Perseverance in them, shall hazard the Salvation of any one of them. But so far as Men allow themselves to teach, believe, or practise, contrary to his Commands, they forfeit their Title to his gracious Presence, which evidently depends on their Obedience to those Commands. And consequently no Set of Men in the World have a Right to argue, as the Ro-

^w Matth. xviii. 20.

manists would fain do ; that Christ hath promised to be with his Church for ever ; and therefore their Church, or the Majority of the whole Church, can teach only what he appointed they should. But ours is a very just Way of arguing ; that we teach what Christ appointed we should, and therefore we are a Part of his Church, with which he hath promised to be for ever. For that our Doctrines are Catholic, however the *Romanists* have stolen the Name, we are bold to say, and fully able to prove : on this Account we have nothing to fear. Could we but say as much of our Lives too, then all were well.

But alas, though they have little Cause on Comparison to reproach us in this Respect, we have much Cause to reproach ourselves. The Number of professed Christians amongst us indeed is large : yet even that is lessening. But the Number of such as are truly Christians, and behave like Christians—What shall we say of this ? May God, *who commanded the Light to shine out of Darknes*, cause the Light of his Gospel to *shine* more effectually *into the Hearts of Men* *, and brighten the very dark Prospect there is before us concerning spiritual Matters ;

* 2 Cor. iv. 6.

that we may *know, at least in this our Day, the Things which belong to our Peace* y, our present and future Happiness. But what others will do, is for them to consider: and what shall be the Consequences of Mens Doings, is for God to appoint. Let us only look to our own Souls; that in the Midst of a bad World we be, as we ought, innocent, prudent, and exemplary; that we watch over those, who are under our Care, and warn others as we have Opportunity; that, by openly professing the Gospel of Christ, we encourage the Profession of it; and, by adorning our Profession with a suitable Conduct, do Honour to it. Provided we behave thus; let others behave as they please, and the Event be what it will to them, and to all, in temporal Concerns; to us the final Event however shall be good. Christianity began with a very small Number: and were it to be reduced to an equally small one again, we might take the same Comfort still, which our Saviour gave his Disciples at first: *Fear not, little Flock: for it is your Father's good Pleasure to give you the Kingdom* z. *The Kingdoms of this Earth* we have Cause to hope will yet, in due Time, notwithstanding all Appearances to the contrary,

y Luke xix. 42.

z Luke xii. 32.

become the Kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ ^a, in a much ampler Manner than they have hitherto been. But the Kingdom of Heaven, *God, who cannot lie* ^b, hath, in the plainest Terms, promised to the faithful Disciples of his Son. And all who have secured his Presence with them here, by a Life of Religion and Virtue, shall assuredly reign with him for ever hereafter in those blessed *Mansions of his Father's House*, whither *he is gone to prepare a Place for us, and will come again, and receive us unto himself, that where he is, there we may be also* ^c.

^a Rev. xi. 15.

^b Tit. i. 2.

^c John xiv. 2, 3.

S E R M O N I I I .

EPHESIANS iv. 26.

Be ye angry, and sin not.

THE Nature of Almighty God being absolutely perfect and uncompounded, neither Passions nor Affections, properly so called, have any Place in it: but his Actions all proceed from uniform and unmixed Regard to Truth and Equity. His Creatures, incapable of attaining to be in any Respect what he is, fall short of it in different Degrees, from those Spirits above, that approach nearest to pure Intelligence, though infinitely distant from it, to the lowest Inhabitants of Earth, which have no other Guide than Appetites and Instincts. Man is of a middle Rank; and partakes, almost equally, of inferior Principles to excite and move him, where Reason would be insufficient,

ficient, and of Reason to direct and restrain these, where else they would take a wrong Course, or exceed proper Bounds. Our Proportion therefore of lower Faculties, though a Proof that we are very imperfect, contributes to our being on the Whole less so, than we should have been ; and a due Regulation of them by the higher, will make us continually more perfect than we are. This is the great Employment allotted us by our Maker here on Earth : which indeed we often find much Pain in attempting, but should suffer much greater by neglecting, and shall be rewarded eternally for performing.

Now, according to the several Kinds of our inward Dispositions, the moral Discipline of them varies. Some, as the benevolent Sort, require chiefly to be strengthened : some again, as the irascible, to be kept in Subjection. And indeed our Anger is so hard to be governed, and the Cause of such dreadful Evils, when it is not governed ; that no Wonder, if great and wise Men have seemed to speak of it, as totally and essentially vicious ; as requiring to be, not only moderated but rooted out. Yet, as those Parts of the outward Frame of Nature, which have produced at any Time the most frightful Effects,

fects, appear notwithstanding, on due Inquiry, beneficial Constituents of that Whole, which the Creator originally pronounced to be good : let us not condemn, without Reserve, this Part of our inward Frame ; which he hath planted in our Breasts, otherwise it had never existed there ; and which, in Condescension to our Understandings, he hath ascribed to himself.

Resentment is, in its primitive Nature, a just and generous Movement of the Mind, expressing that Displeasure against ill Actions, which they deserve : and, in our Hearts at least, such Disapprobation of what is wrong seems inseparably connected with approving what is right. From this Principle, applied to ourselves, we feel a Scorn of Baseness and Vice, that prompts us to reject it with Disdain, when we are tempted to it : or a consequent Self-Dislike, if we have fallen under the Temptation, which doth not easily allow us any Rest, till we have returned to our Duty. The same Principle, pointed towards our Fellow-Creatures, deters them from enterprising Wickedness, and invigorates us to resist it : or, if it be already committed, stirs us up to set before them the Offensiveness of their Conduct in so strong a Light, as may induce them to reform it. And thus

thus Anger, though it designs to give Uneasiness, is so very different from Hatred, as to be often the best Proof of Love. But when just Indignation cannot amend the faulty, then it comes in properly to punish them : to counter-balance that excessive Tenderness, to which, however amiable, it would in some Cases be a fatal Weakness to yield, and support us in the painful Work of *executing Wrath on him that doth Evil* ^d.

Thus useful and important is this Passion : by which our Saviour himself was occasionally moved, as when he *was much displeased* with his Disciples ^e, and *looked round about on the Jews with Anger, being grieved for the Hardness of their Hearts* ^f. He hath declared indeed, *that whosoever is angry with his Brother without a Cause, shall be in Danger of the Judgement* ^g : but that very Limitation implies, that there are Causes, for which we may *do well to be angry* ^h. Or even were his Threatening originally unlimited, as in some Copies it is ; yet the Reason of the Case, his own Example, and other Texts of Scripture, oblige us to understand him only of the unjust Kinds of

^d Rom. xiii. 4.

^g Matth. v. 22.

^e Mark x. 14.

^h Jonah iv. 9.

^f Mark iii. 5.

Anger: which are so much commoner than the allowable, that they have almost appropriated the Name, and turned it to an ill Meaning. Whence perhaps it is, that the Stoic Philosophers condemn this Passion in the most general Terms ⁱ, while yet they not only allow it to be useful to those, in whom Reason singly hath not sufficient Force ^k, but expressly tolerate, in their ideal perfectly wise Man, such gentler Commotions of Mind, and Resemblances of Anger, as are in Reality moderate Degrees of it ^l. And, (which deserves much greater Attention), St. *Paul*, who within a few Verses of the Text hath commanded *all Wrath and Anger to be put away from* ^m Christians, gives, notwithstanding, the permissive Direction in it, *Be ye angry, and sin not*.

The Result then must be, that this Passion is indeed a lawful one; but very necessary, and very hard, to be kept within due Bounds; which

ⁱ Thus Cicero, who professes in his Offices, l. 1. c. 2. chiefly to follow the Stoics, blames the Peripatetics, c. 25. for praising Anger, as given us by Nature for our Good, and saith it is to be avoided in all Cases. But he is speaking only concerning Cases of Punishment. However, he forbids it also in Reproofs, c. 38.

^k Utile est eum uti motu animi, qui uti ratione non potest, Cic. Tusc. Disp. l. 4. § 25. Ed. Davies.

^l Sentiet [sapiens] levem quandam tenuemque motum—umbra Affectuum. Sen. de Ira. l. 1. c. xvi. P. 13. Ed. Lipf. Vid. et. l. 2.

^m v. 31.

Considerations recommend the following Method in discoursing upon it.

I. To describe the due Bounds, with the common Excesses, of Anger.

II. To dissuade from such Excesses.

III. To direct how they may be avoided.

I. To describe the due Bounds, with the common Excesses, of Anger.

Now the proper Bound for all Passion, is Reason. And we are then only moved by our Affections as we ought, when they excite us to what our Understandings on Reflection approve. But because a Rule so general is not sufficiently instructive, I shall enlarge on the several Particulars comprehended under it, which are specified by the Philosopher, in his *Ethics*, thus, that *He, who is angry, only on such Occasions as he ought, and with such Persons as he ought, and in such Manner, and at such Time, and for such Continuance, as he ought, deserves Praise in the Exercise of this Passion*ⁿ.

I. On such Occasions as he ought. What these are, hath already in some Measure appeared. Were they, with whom we have to do, constantly virtuous and wise, there

ⁿ Aristot. Eth. Nicom. l. iv. c. 5.

would be no Occasion. But now their Transgressions against God, our Fellow-Creatures, and ourselves, furnish, alas, but too many. When our Maker, whom we ought to reverence and love with our whole Souls, is dishonoured ; when his Laws and the Sanctions of them (the Ground-work of all Security and all Comfort) are insulted ; surely it is Cause not only of Grief, but Indignation. When the helpless are oppressed, the well-meaning circumvented, Innocence aspersed or seduced, Faith broken, Kindness requited with ill Usage, or public Good sacrificed to private Views, we both may, and must (if we have any Sympathy with our Kind) feel our Spirit rise in their Behalf. And though we can neither interpose to assist all that suffer, nor permit our Tempers to be ruffled as often as Injustice is committed upon Earth ; yet in all proper Ways we ought to shew, that we strongly dislike all such Things : and it is an ill Sign, when Persons are indifferent in the Cases of others, and will stand up for no one's Interests, but their own.

Wrongs done to ourselves we are all so apt to resent, at least enough, that it may seem needless, and even dangerous, to say any Thing of these, as one lawful Occasion for Anger.

But the Truth must be acknowledged, that this Passion being given us, in a great Measure, for our own Defence, we may innocently exert a competent Degree of it for that Purpose. Nor can we help, generally speaking, being a little more moved at our own Injuries and Sufferings, than those of others; because we cannot but have a livelier Sense of them; and the Emotion of Mind, which proceeds from that Sense, must bear some Proportion to it.

One Thing more to be observed is, that though Faults are the only just Ground of Resentment; and the greater they are, the more the Ground: yet, when they do not amount to Crimes, but are only Neglects or Transgressions of some smaller Obligation; still, since a great deal of Inconvenience in Life arises, even from these Instances of wrong Behaviour; they warrant and require such lower Marks of our Displeasure, especially when the culpable are placed under our Inspection, as may be requisite for their Amendment.

And now it might well be hoped, that a sufficient Latitude was given to this necessary Evil, the Exercise of Anger. But these are
narrow

narrow Bounds for a Passion, which, if let loose, will admit of none. We can be angry with Persons, not only for their Faults, but their good Qualities and Accomplishments, when they excel, or come too near, Us or our Favourites : not only for doing amiss, but for doing their Duty, if it interfere with any of our Designs or Humours. Nay, we can be angry with them for having done their Duty to us ; done the kindest Thing they could for us, reminded us of our Failings, though in a friendly Way ; or shewn themselves in any Instance more concerned for us, than we are for ourselves. We can be angry with Persons, even when they have done us Kindnesses ; for not doing us such great ones, or not so soon, or not in such a Manner, as we would have had them : though perhaps they were not bound to do us any. And we can be extremely angry with them for having any Degree of Regard to their own Interests, when ours are concerned : first looking upon ourselves as all the World, and the rest of Mankind as nothing ; then fired with the utmost Indignation, that this should be disputed.

But in lesser Matters, we can be angry with Men even for their natural Tempers, when

they happen to be more gravely, or more chearfully, or any Way differently, turned from our own: for their not liking the same Employments or Amusements, their not falling into the same Opinions and Ways of thinking, sometimes on the most trifling Subjects; nay, for not perceiving and acknowledging immediately the Strength of an Argument, or the Weight of an Authority.

Again, we can be angry for the unkind Words or Actions, to which we ourselves have given the Provocation: and will make no Allowances for little Unreasonablenesses in others, where we have, perhaps by great ones, set the Pattern, and thrown the Temptation in their Way. We can be angry at those who are employed by us, for mistaking or not succeeding in Cases, where they have done as well as ever they could, and certainly did not contrive to be ignorant or fail on Purpose to vex us. We can be angry at them for mere accidental Misfortunes in our Affairs: Things, which were not provided against, because they were not to be expected; or which a reasonable Degree of Care proved insufficient to provide against; or, it may be, which all the Care in the World could not have prevented.

vented. Nay, in our idlest Diversions, we can be as vehemently discomposed, as about the most important Business. And, in the general Course of our Behaviour, we can be impatient about every Thing, if we have been made uneasy about any Thing: and quite out of Humour, perhaps for a considerable Time together, without either having, or almost thinking we have, any Manner of Provocation to it. Indeed something of this, in too many, seems constitutional: and, so far as it is, ought to have Allowances made for it by every one, except those who are liable to it. But they themselves cannot reflect too seriously, how often and how much they make all about them suffer for no Cause at all; and those most, whom they ought least: how strangely and wildly unreasonable they are, when under the Power of this bad Spirit: and how firmly they are obliged to watch against it continually, and free themselves, when seized by it, as soon as possibly they can.

In all these Instances, Anger is so evidently unjust, that happily no Pretence can be made for indulging it. But there are others, in which, Faults having been really committed, a Plea for resenting is really furnished; and

yet, if we resolve to act rightly and wisely, no Resentment at all must be shewn or entertained. We have not been received perhaps with the good Breeding, or treated with the Regard or good Humour, that we might expect : Expressions, not so prudent or obliging, have dropt from Persons in Relation to us : Things, in which we meant no Harm, have been taken wrong : Our Desires and Inclinations have not been consulted, when they ought : Our Opinion or Recommendation hath been too little attended to : Our Advice or Directions too little observed : or some one or another of a thousand Matters of this Sort hath happened. And doubtless every one of them, supposing the Fact to have been as we imagine, is a Fault : and, though of a slighter Sort, should be carefully avoided by those, with whom we live ; and, let me add, by ourselves too. But, alas, they with whom we live, and we ourselves too, are Creatures, naturally subject to such Faults. Indiscretions and Thoughtlessness, odd Humours and Perverseness, little Partialities and Prejudices, ever were and will be amongst Men, even the better Kind of Men. And therefore what can be done ? Either we must all give and take

Offence almost every Hour of our Lives ; or we must be content to make mutual Allowances, and put good Construtions on Things : wink at what had better not be seen ; forget as soon as possible, what we could not help seeing ; and teach those by our Example, who, we think, have need to learn, friendly Dispositions, and respectful Behaviour. This is the only Way of mending Matters : and shameful as it is to our Species, half the Uneasinesses, that we feel in Life, proceed from our not taking it.

2. The next Part of the Rule before-mentioned is, that we be angry only with such Persons as we ought.

And here immediately occurs a criminal Use of this Passion, almost too shocking to mention : I mean, when we are angry with our Maker. For against whom else is it, that our Displeasure is pointed, when we murmur at the Distribution of Things here, either because our own Condition is less agreeable than we would have it, or that of others more prosperous, than we imagine they deserve ? The former is direct Rebellion of the Heart against the Dispositions of infinite Wisdom and Goodness : an Arrogance, which in Creatures otherwise innocent would be monstrous ;

and how much more so in miserable Sinners ! The latter indeed would appear a virtuous Concern at the Encouragement, which frequent Success gives to Wickedness and Unworthiness. Nor can it be doubted, but we have Cause, often to be sorry, and sometimes to be angry, with those around us, when this happens through their Fault. And yet indulging either of these Dispositions too far, will reduce us to a very uncomfortable and very blameable State of Mind. But to be provoked, that God suffers Men to act thus, is claiming to govern the World in his Stead : whose Abhorrence of Sin, and of Disproportion, we ought to consider, is infinitely greater than ours can be : and therefore if, for good and wise Reasons he thinks fit to bear with it, well may we do so too ; and wait with Patience for the appointed Time, when every seeming Irregularity shall appear to have joined in producing the most beautiful Order. *Fret not thyself because of the ungodly, neither be thou envious against the Evil-doers. Leave off from Wrath, and let go Displeasure : else shalt thou be moved to do Evil. Hold thee still in the Lord, and abide patiently upon him °. For surely there is an End, and thine Expectation shall not be cut off ².*

° Ps. xxxvii. 1, 8, 7.

² Prov. xxiii. 18.

But as Anger against our Maker is impious, against some of our Fellow-Creatures also it is highly improper : those particularly, under whose Authority we are ; and all, in some Measure, whose Rank is higher than our own. Of them, beyond others, we ought not without strong Reasons even to think ill, much less to blame them openly, and least of all to their Faces. But if some extraordinary Occasion should happen to require it, their Station absolutely demands, that we suppress much of that Roughness of Manner, and familiar Warmth of Expostulation, which perhaps towards Equals might not be unfit. For he, who is angry and finds Fault, assumes a Kind of Superiority for the Time : which Inferiors ought rarely to do, and with great Moderation, if at all ; though doubtless in gentler Terms, they may freely represent whatever concerns them.

Another Sort of Persons, exempted from all Heat of Resentment, and therefore certainly of Reproof, are our Benefactors and our Friends. Where we have received Favours, it would be very hard to let a few Unkindnesses, because they came last, blot out every Thing that went before ; and move us to speak or think
with

with the same Severity, as we would of others. Nothing, but gross and repeated Provocations, ought to have this Effect. And we should be extremely backward to imagine, that they, whom we have seen taking Pleasure to do us Good, design us any Harm.. Then as to our Friends: the Esteem, which we have entertained for them, surely must be founded on Merit sufficient to shelter a Number of lesser Faults from angry Notice. Friendship implies a tacit Covenant of mutual Forbearance: without which it would be in Danger of breaking every Day. It permits indeed, and sometimes requires, Remonstrances to be made: but never without some weighty Cause; and always with such Gentleness, and evident Proofs of cordial good Will, as may, if possible, draw closer those Bonds, which nothing but the last Necessity should untie. And even then, having once been Friends is a powerful Reason, both of Prudence and Conscience, to restrain us from ever becoming Enemies.

Others are privileged against our Anger upon any particular Misbehaviour, by the general Goodness of their Character and Conduct. We are all so far from Perfection, that whoever intends, and acts right in the main, merits an Esteem for it, that should cover a Multitude

itude of smaller Offences, or however greatly moderate our Displeasure at them. And indeed, shewing worthy Persons, in the mildest Way, that they have done amiss, will give them a Concern, that needs no Aggravation.

But many, who are more liable to Faults, must yet, on Account of their natural Dispositions be tenderly used. Some cannot support any Harshness of Treatment, but sink under it immediately. Some again, Anger, though not excessive, serves only to exasperate. They will readily enough yield to calm, soft Representations : but are impatient of Rebuke. To such therefore we should condescend a little : and think it sufficient Amends, that we are almost sure of prevailing on them by such Means, as (if we have any good Nature,) will be far the most agreeable to ourselves. But there are likewise, it must be owned, People in the World, whom it is easy to make worse by rough Usage, and not easy to make better by any other. That these deserve to have their Tempers much consulted, cannot be said. But still, partly from Charity and partly from Discretion, we must treat them in the Method, by which they are likeliest to prove tractable : and, resolving first, to have as little to do with them as we can ;
endeavour

endeavour to get over what we must have to do with them, as quietly as we are able.

There is also a great Variety, not only in Tempers, but in Understandings and Abilities, which ought to be considered on this Occasion. We pass by many Faults in Children without Anger, if we are at all considerate : because they know not, as yet, the Rules of Behaviour ; or, through the Levity, incident to their Age, are turned aside from recollecting them. Now, for the same Reason, such of riper Years, as either by Nature have less Readiness, or Accuracy, or Sedateness ; or, from their Education less Acquaintance with Propriety, or the Customs of the World, should in Proportion be exempted from Blame, when they misbehave ; especially in small Points, and such as are beyond their Reach, or out of their Way. Besides, Men cannot be always attentive to every Part of what they do know. And some have constitutionally so uncommon a Share of Thoughtlessness, that, with the same, nay, much more Desire and Pains, than others, to be exact and punctual, they appear to be singularly negligent. These evidently need Compassion : and Severity to them would be barbarous. Now and then indeed a little Chiding may
may

may be necessary for the Cure of their Infir-
mity ; but it ought never to be more than is
necessary, and always intermixed with Expres-
sions of Encouragement.

Thus you have seen, who are the least fit
Objects of our Displeasure : after which it will
be useful to specify, who are the most fit ; and
may allowably have much greater Liberties
taken with them by us, than commonly are. I
mean ourselves : of whom we probably know
full as great Misdemeanors, and from whom we
have certainly received much greater Injuries,
than from any one else ; over whom also we
have the largest Authority, and are the most in-
dispensably bound to exercise it. Yet even here
it is possible to be guilty of Excess. For Anger
must aim at Good, when directed against our-
selves, no less than if it were against any other
Person : and is always faulty, when it tends to
our Harm ; even were it no further Harm, than
discomposing us beyond Reason. And some
want to be cautioned in the strongest Manner,
at Times, to beware of immoderate Self-Dif-
like, because it may urge them to the rashest
and most fatal Extremities. But Self-Indul-
gence is infinitely the commoner Failing : and
therefore the general Rule must ever be to
preach

preach up due Rigour in this Case; for due Tenderness will seldom be forgotten. Here then we may well employ that superfluous Warmth of Spirit, which we are apt to turn quite another Way; and shall never employ it better, than to correct its own Exorbitances: that, so spending our Displeasure upon our own unjust Vehemence, we may *put on* towards all our Brethren, (and every human Creature is such,) *Bowels of Mercies, Kindness, Humbleness of Mind, Meekness, Long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another,—even as Christ hath forgiven us:—and let the Peace of God rule in our Hearts, to the which we are also called in one Body* ^a.

^a Col. iii. 12, 13. 15.

S E R M O N IV.

EPHESIANS iv. 26.

Be ye angry, and sin not.

IN a former Discourse on these Words, after proving, that Anger is a lawful Passion, but a very dangerous one, I proposed,

- I. To describe its due Bounds, with the common Excesses of it.
- II. To dissuade from such Excesses.
- III. To direct how they may be avoided.

Now in general the Bounds of every Passion are those, which Reason, sufficiently enlightened, prescribes. And the particular Bounds, which it prescribes to this Passion, are, as I have already observed, well enumerated in the Philosopher's Rule: that *he who is angry, only on such Occasions, and with such Persons, and in such Manner, and at such Time, and for such*

Conti-

Continuance, as he ought, deserves Praise in the Exercise of this Faculty. On the two first of these Heads therefore, the Occasions and Objects of our Anger, I have already enlarged : and, as the proper ones will be almost sure to be remembered, and the improper ones are much too many to be specified again, I shall proceed, without any Repetition of either, to the following Part of the Rule, which is

III. That we be angry only in such Manner as we ought. This comprehends both the Degree, to which our Displeasure may allowably rise, and the Instances in which it may be fitly expressed.

There is a Possibility of being less angry than we should. Our Sense of wrong Actions may be too faint : and by taking, in Consequence of this, but a slight Notice of them, we may confirm the faulty in a bad Course, instead of deterring them from it. And especially, when their Faults do us no Harm, whatever they may do to others or themselves, we are often very backward either to express or feel any Resentment, even where it is our peculiar Duty. But if, while they injure others, they serve us ; far from being displeased, we are very apt to defend and encourage them. Yet
there

there are some in the World, whom a generous Ardor of Mind occasionally discomposes too much, on seeing Injustice done to their Fellow-Creatures. But these are rare. It is in our own Cases usually, that we are inclined to Excess : and in them our Danger is very great. To avoid it therefore, we should, all of us, frequently reflect, that our Passions being only given us for Auxiliaries, to supply the Imperfection of our higher Principles ; if they move us enough to set us upon acting right, it suffices ; and if they move us more than is requisite for that End, it will commonly be too much. Where we properly can, the very Appearance of Displeasure should be avoided : for, though it be a Method of Cure, yet, being a disagreeable one, if we have Recourse to it without Need, we treat our Patient ill. And, even where we must shew ourselves offended, this may very well be done, indeed best of all, without allowing ourselves to be inwardly disturbed. For thus, at the same Time that we preserve a due Authority over those, with whom we are concerned, we shall keep our own Temper in a State of Tranquillity, and fit for whatever lies before us. In Matters of Moment, it is not always in our Power to be absolutely

calm : but this Consideration should increase our Care not to be agitated too much. For he, who is angry more than he hath Cause, is so far *angry without a Cause*. And therefore we must have Regard, both to the Proportion of the Fault, and our Right to take Notice of it. For a Person may deserve a great deal of Anger, and yet deserve little or none from us.

Exact Determinations indeed of this Proportion are hard to give : and probably would do Harm, if they could easily be given. For, were the Limits of lawful Anger in every Case precisely known, most People would venture without Scruple to the utmost Extent of them ; and so of Course be hurried beyond them : whereas the Difficulty of discerning exactly where the Transgression begins, is a strong Caution to stop at a safe Distance from it. But instead of thinking thus, we commonly conclude, that since Anger may justly rise according to the Provocation, and much of it is daily shewn about small Things, any Degree whatever is defensible in great ones. Now evidently this Reasoning ought to be inverted as follows : only a moderate Resentment being permitted us, where the Offence

fence is ever so heinous, hardly the slightest ought to be expressed, where it is but little.

And though we cannot ascertain minutely the due Quantity in each ; the Observation of two Rules will secure us from any important Error : never to lose the Government of ourselves, or do an Injury to any one else. The first of these Directions is fundamental. For if once Reason be dethroned, Rules and Bounds are nothing. And though it be a dreadful Evil to let any *Passion seduce us from obeying that Principle, which God hath authorized to regulate our whole Conduct*, yet it is peculiarly dangerous to follow this blindfold : which precipitates Men instantaneously, and without leaving Room for a Moment's Reflection, into the Extremities of Mischief to others and themselves ; and even where it is not hurtful, is however singularly disagreeable and unbecoming. We must therefore attentively remember, that, though Displeasure may be allowable, Rage cannot : and accordingly forbear, not only all Acts of Violence or Insult, but all vehement Gestures, all noisy and unreasonable Talk, and above the rest that shocking, though common Method of venting Fury, by Oaths and Imprecations : invoking the Notice of God

in a Condition when we ought to dread it; and bringing down that Wrath on our own Heads, which we vainly and wickedly call for upon others.

But avoiding these Extravagances is not all : *is nothing indeed, if, under a calmer Appearance, we permit our Resentment to go undue Lengths.* It is true, Anger can be useful to others only by giving them Uneasiness : but often a plain and grave Signification, that we dislike their Behaviour, will give it sufficiently : and then to add cutting, though guarded, Words is cruel. Sometimes the same Person, having both blameable and valuable Qualities, nay exerting both together, may deserve that Reproof should be tempered with Praise. And where but little Forbearance hath been merited, Prudence frequently requires much to be exercised : because it may soften and win over those, whom Roughness would drive to Desperation.

And, if we ought thus to moderate the just Expressions of our Displeasure : much more ought unjust ones to be utterly forborn. We must by no means think, that every trifling, or perhaps imaginary, Provocation gives us a Liberty, which the very greatest do not, of be-

traying Secrets, throwing random Aspersions, and saying in the peevish Fit whatever it suggests. Men do not lose all the Rights of human Nature immediately, because they have chanced to offend us. *Their Fault in doing so may be considerable, or may be small : but this one Crime cannot transform them into quite different Creatures from what they were before : it can never intitle us to speak Falsehoods of them : and very seldom, to say prejudicial Truths.* Injurious Words may seem a slight Matter to those who utter them ; especially if they are such, as the World calls decent : but the Person, to whom they relate, experiences them to be heavy and bitter Things : and what his Feelings must be, is the Point, that we should have in View, reflecting what our own would be in the like Case.

However, the Guilt of Anger is yet more aggravated, when it misguides our Actions, as well as our Tongues. If it prompts us only to withhold from others, without Cause, those Kindnesses and Favours, to which they had some equitable Claim, or, which, though they had not, we had hitherto shewn them, or intended for them ; this alone is very hard and wrong Usage. Indeed who almost could be secure

even of a Day's Continuance of Friendship, if every Thing, which it were possible to take amiss, might put an End to it? But, if Wrath push us on to do Harm instead of Good, then it hath arrived at its Height of Injustice. Not but we may lawfully in some Cases inflict Punishment on those, who have given us Offence. *But then Anger is not to be the Prosecutor: much less to pass or execute the Sentence.* It is not so often, as we are justly displeased with any one, that he is to suffer: but then only, when a valuable Purpose requires it. Now we are by no Means qualified to determine that Point, while our inward Disturbance is vehement: nor should we ever allow ourselves to act, before we are cool enough to judge: nor are we always cool enough, when we think we are. And therefore we should learn to suspect our Tempers, have Regard to the Opinion of the unprejudiced, and lean to the moderate Side, when there is any Doubt which is right. It will comparatively seldom happen, that Excess of Mildness will do any great Mischief: but the contrary Extreme causes an incredible deal perpetually. Every Day we see those, who are possessed by this evil Spirit, return monstrous Acts of Injustice for slight Instances

stances of Neglect or Unfriendliness ; imagine their Displeasure, whencesoever it arises, a Justification for stirring up all the World against the Object of it ; and look upon themselves as ill used, if every one else will not be as unreasonable, as they are.

But I go on the next Branch of the Rule, *which is,*

IV. That we be angry only at such Times,
as we ought.

And therefore it immediately occurs, never till we are sure, that the Thing, which offends us, is really done, and really a Matter to take Offence at. *Blame not, before thou hast examined the Truth : understand first, and then rebuke* *. Some are eternally suspecting, and finding Fault at all Adventures : as if they felt a Delight in the Imagination of Things being amiss. These, even when there happens to be Foundation for their Censures, are in the wrong notwithstanding ; for it is more than they knew beforehand ; but, when it proves, as it often will, that all their ill Humour was groundless ; this is very shameful to themselves, and very injurious to others ; hardens them, instead of having any good Effect upon them ; and brings

* Eccclus. xi. 7.

them at last to think it the better Way, since they must be blamed, to be blamed for something. But suppose there be an Appearance of Reason to chide : yet Appearances are deceitful ; and Passion spreads a Mist before our Understandings, which keeps us from seeing any thing exactly, and makes every thing look bigger than it is. No one therefore should express, or even inwardly indulge, the least Warmth, till he hath first considered the Case, as calmly as he can ; and then, if there be Room for it, hath given the Parties, whom he suspects, Liberty and Time to make their Defence ; attending to it with a sincere Desire of finding them innocent ; making no Determination, till he hath searched the Matter fully ; and being, in Obedience to St. *James's* Direction, *swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to Wrath* ^b. The passionate Person is just the Reverse of this : impatient of all Attempts to set him right ; resolute to have that true, which he hath once imagined ; eager to pass and execute immediate Judgement. It may therefore be of the utmost Consequence to get, though it were only a little Space, for cool Reflection. There is very small Danger, but that even after it we shall be

^b James i. 19.

angry enough, if we have Cause : and there is great Danger, that without it we may be angry, though we have no Cause ; or at least much more angry, than we have any Shadow of Cause.

But admitting it to be seasonable for us to conceive the Indignation, that we do : yet several Things may render the present Time improper to vent it. We may be likely just then to exceed due Bounds : at least it may discompose us too much ; and perhaps unfit us for Duties or Employments, to which we are immediately called : it may give Uneasiness, or shew Disrespect, to the Company we are in, whom we should never unnecessarily trouble with our Vexations : or it may have a wrong Effect on the Object of our Displeasure. If he be under the more than ordinary Influence of some vehement Passion, or his Reason be any other Way disturbed or clouded ; if some Prejudice, which cannot be removed instantly, makes him deaf in the mean while to all, that we can say ; if his Temper be not now serious enough to mind Reproof, or the Circumstances of Time or Place or Company be such, that he will resent it as an Indignity : *the Discretion of a Man*

*a Man should defer his Anger**, how eager soever it may be to burst forth. But we are still more firmly bound to restrain ourselves, when the faulty have suffered by their Faults, and want Consolation instead of Rebuke. Resentment was planted in us to discourage or withstand the injurious, not to insult the miserable: to give People a lively Sense of their Misbehaviour; not to triumph over them, when they have that Sense already; perhaps more of it, than they can well bear. Or, though they feel their Folly but imperfectly, yet if the Consequences of it be heavy upon them; either casting them off, or severely reproaching them, at such Times, is very ungenerous: and kind Forbearance, one would imagine, cannot fail to make the good Impressions on them, that we wish. If indeed they still remain void of Reflection on their Conduct, and it be our Province to awaken them, we must attempt it: but as gently, as the Case will permit; and perhaps, not till having done whatever we properly can towards relieving their Distresses, we thus acquire an indisputable Right of laying before them, with some Warmth

* Prov. xix. 11.

of Expostulation, their past Errors, in order to prevent the future.

The concluding Part of the Rule under Consideration is,

V. That we be angry only so long as we ought.

It is possible indeed, though very uncommon, that Men may lay aside their Displeasure, at least the Appearance of it, too soon; before it hath produced its intended Effect: and, giving more Credit, than they have Cause, to a few fair Promises, take little Notice, how they are performed. Thus every one around them finds out the Way of dealing with them: and perceiving, on how easy Terms all may be made up, transgresses without Fear. Sometimes the very same Person is in the first Moments much too violent, and afterwards, possibly from a Conscioufness of that, as much too remiss: and so is blameable and despised on both Accounts. But the opposite Extreme is the ordinary one: and generally the worst Sin, that accompanies this Passion. Some Excess of sudden Anger is to many a Frailty scarce avoidable. For it is exceedingly difficult to escape being carried a little too far by an Emotion of Mind, which seems to be only Zeal for what is

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is right, and allows such short Warning to be on our Guard. If indeed we let one thing or another be provoking us almost perpetually, we must not think it a great Alleviation, that our Peevishness doth not dwell on any single Point long, but quickly provides itself a fresh Object. Or if we fly out at once into such Extravagances, as to do in a little Time almost as much Mischief, as we could in a great deal : it is a poor Plea to make in our own Favour, that when we have satiated our Fury, or worn down our Spirits with it, we are calm again.

But if undue Hastiness neither returns frequently, nor goes outrageous Lengths ; though always a Transgression, yet it is in some Measure an excuseable one ; whereas the Aggravations of rooted lasting Bitterness are most heinous. For when there hath been Space for Warmth to cool, for Reason to resume its Dominion, for Religion to soften Men into a Spirit of Forgiveness, for Friends to interpose their Advice and Persuasions, for every Motive to exert itself ; still to continue implacable, and deliberately to fortify ourselves in the Wrong, is confirmed Wickedness. And yet Men indulge it strangely : and if nothing chances in a very little while to appease their first Rage, allow it

to settle into a Habit of ill Will ; which giving them less impetuous Agitations, than they felt at first, they fancy themselves to have sufficiently recovered their Temper, and proceed in their Guilt without suspecting it. We should therefore be conscientiously watchful over our Hearts in this Particular. And readiest of all we should be to lay aside that Displeasure, which we ought never to have entertained : and be Friends again immediately, when it is our own Fault, that we ever were otherwise. Yet, I fear, many cherish unreasonable Resentment, because they secretly feel it is unreasonable, and never forgive those, whom they have once injured. They have run into a Difficulty, out of which they cannot extricate themselves to their Liking : and therefore will persist for ever in acting amiss, rather than own, that they have acted so at all. Now, it must be granted, their Situation is a very mortifying one. Anger implies a Charge upon another of Misbehaviour. And when this Charge hath been brought and urged, perhaps in very strong Terms ; to retract it, and make Submissions instead of receiving them, must doubtless be a Task highly disagreeable : which is an excellent Reason for
avoiding

avoiding causeless Wrath : but it is no Reason for persevering in it. *Solomon's Counsel is very wise : Go not forth hastily to strive, lest thou know not what to do in the End thereof, when thy Neighbour hath put thee to Shame*^a. But if we are got into such a Condition, the speediest Retreat is the best. Good People will moderate our Shame, by accepting our first Advances towards a Confession, that we have erred. And if others require fuller Satisfaction, we must give it them : for it would be monstrous to do them yet more Wrong, because we have done them some already.

But nearest in Guilt to the Anger, which was originally causeless, is that which becomes so by lasting beyond its Cause. Many Things furnish just Ground of Animadversion ; so just, that we should be to blame, if we omitted it : and yet are of so slight a Nature, that we should be more to blame, if we did not, after duly signifying our Dislike of them, return immediately to our former Disposition and Behaviour, even towards the Person concerned. For there would be no living in any Comfort, if every little Offence were to be lengthened out, and the most made of it that can. There-

^a Prov. xxv. 8.

fore in such Cases, far from *letting the Sun go down upon our Wrath**, we should not let the next Hour, sometimes the next Moment, see the least Marks of it. Where there is Need, they may continue longer: and be increased or lessened, according to the Occasion. The Tokens of our Displeasure may be suspended for a Time, and gentler Methods tried; which are always the best, when they are likely to be effectual; then resumed, if Circumstances demand it. But as soon as ever the Fault is reformed, though not perfectly, yet as far as we can fairly expect, after all Allowances made, (and in most Cases a great many should be made) then without Delay we should declare ourselves reconciled, for we cannot any longer *be angry and not sin*.

One principal Discouragement of such Reformation is, that we commonly require of Persons, besides the Assurance of giving no Offence for the future, great Submissions for what is past. And they should always think it their Duty to make them: but we should for the most Part think it ours not to insist on them. Indeed their chief Objection against acknowledging their Misdemeanour, frequently

* Eph. iv. 26.

So S E R M O N IV.

is, that they imagine it will be in vain. And were they but undeceived by any little Intimations of our Disposition to forgive, they would repay us fully afterwards for that Goodness, to which they would gladly have applied before, if Despair had not withheld them. Or if they cannot even thus be brought to own themselves culpable in so many Words : yet perhaps they will do it, readily and sufficiently, in a less direct Manner. And the Truth is, that some Sorts of Acknowledgements may be unsuitable to some Sorts of Persons on some Occasions. But if any one should by Mistake apprehend it beneath him to comply with what in Strictness he is bound to : yet, provided he shews but any Way, that he is conscious of his Error, and purposes to avoid it for the future, both Charity and Humanity forbid rigorous Demands of more. Nay, though even such tacit Confessions and Promises may be somewhat imperfect and ambiguous, favourable and liberal Constructions ought to be put upon them : for we should ever encourage Persons to amend by facilitating the Means of it, to the best of our Power. Much more then is it incumbent on us to banish Resentment intirely, when all the Satisfaction

faction hath been offered us, that can be made, though perhaps a full Compensation can never be made: For it is not the Damage, but the Injury done us, that justifies our Anger. And therefore, when the Injury is removed by Repentance, though the Damage continue, the Anger ought to cease: because the Offender being now returned to his right Mind, and become what he should, Displeasure against him afterwards is Displeasure against a good Person, instead of a bad one.

I do not say, that we ought always immediately to believe every one, who professes Concern, and makes fair Promises. But we certainly ought to be careful, that Passion doth not keep us from believing what in itself is probable. Unless we are as ready to be reconciled, as we were to be provoked; and give as much Credit, upon equal Proof, to the Penitence, as we did to the Crime; we are not in a reasonable and Christian Temper. If therefore the Evidences of any one's Amendment be strong enough only to suspend our bad Opinion of him, we should suspend our Anger too: and as they grow sufficient to change it, we should change proportionably into kind Behaviour, and due Esteem.

Indeed, supposing there be no Amendment in him, though we cannot possibly think well of him in that Respect, yet we may in others; for there are strange Mixtures in most People of Faults and good Qualities. Or, were we to think ever so ill of him upon the Whole, and with ever so much Cause, we should by no Means be at Liberty, even then, to cherish a constant Indignation at him boiling in our Breasts: but our Disapprobation of his Character ought to be gentle and mild. For when Anger, from being an occasional Passion for a Time, degenerates into a settled State of Mind, it deserves a harsher Name, that of Rancour. And though in such a State we may appear composed, and may in Reality feel no vehement Emotions, this alone is far from proving us innocent. If ill Will be the Principle of our Conduct towards any of our Fellow-Creatures; if we suppress their Merit, undervalue their good Actions, give a bad Turn to such as are capable of a better, aggravate their Failures, and do them all the Harm that we safely and quietly can; it is no Alleviation, but the contrary, that we are able to do it without losing the Command of ourselves. And there are some of so calm a Malice, that they
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can plot and execute such Mischief, as the most passionate Man, in the very Fit of his Passion, would recoil at ; and yet preserve to others, and perhaps to their own Minds, the Shew of being very good-tempered. But this deliberate silent Hatred, as it is the deepest rooted and most durable, so it is the most horrible, Depravity of all others, and the farthest distant from that Spirit of Forgiveness, without which, we shall not be forgiven.

Let us therefore *in Malice be Children ; but in Understanding, Men^f : let us not be overcome of Evil, but overcome Evil with Good^g.*

^f 1 Cor. xiv. 20.

^g Rom. xii. 21.

S E R M O N V.

EPHESIANS iv. 26.

Be ye angry, and sin not.

THE due Bounds of Anger, with the common Excesses of them, have been described in my two last Discourses : And therefore I now proceed,

II. To dissuade you from them, by shewing you their bad Effects ; of which you cannot but have seen many already : but still it will be needful to set forth Part of them more distinctly, and add others to them.

Some ill Consequences of immoderate Anger we feel immediately from the very Workings of it within us. For the Passion, prone as we are to indulge it, is essentially uneasy. The Goodness of God hath constituted our inward

Frame in such a Manner, that the kind Affections are all attended with Delight : but those Emotions, which tend to give others Pain, produce it first in ourselves ; to restrain us from ever indulging them further than is necessary. The lowest Degree of Displeasure, as the mere Word implies, must be unpleasing : presents unwelcome Thoughts and Views of Things to the Mind, which more or less unfit it, so long as they last, for the chearful and easy Enjoyment of Life. But if it rise to any Heighth, its Agitations are acutely miserable : they rack and tear our Souls ; and, if they return frequently, consume our Health and Vigour : though indeed, were we ever so strong to bear them, there is no Happiness in being able to support the Renewal of Torments. Then, besides this inseparable Feeling, there must often, as it is very fit there should, be a second, for the Time almost intolerable, that of failing in the Mischief, to which our Fury prompts us. And yet Success in it will only, after a short-lived inhuman Transport, bring on a greater Variety of dreadful Sufferings. For there quickly succeeds a State unspeakably painful, of Rage at ourselves instead of others ; or at least of exhausted Spirits, Dejection at
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the Remembrance of our Wickedness and Folly ; bitter, and, it may be, fruitless, Anguish for the cruel Things, that we have said or done. And the longer it is, before we reflect thus, the more Matter we hoard up to make Reflection frightful, when it comes.

Indeed one single Consideration might be enough to prove Anger a wretched Condition ; that our Enemies are always endeavouring to put us into it : whom it is an innocent Revenge to mortify, by resolving to disappoint them ; and preserve ourselves in a Calm, whatever Storms we see around us. He, who doth this, hath found the true Secret, for, passing his Days with Comfort, and conducting his Affairs happily. Such a one sees on all Sides of him, and apprehends every Thing just as it is : makes the most of each favourable Opportunity ; and gives disadvantageous Circumstances the best Turn, of which they are capable. But Passion so infatuates Men, that they run directly upon evident Ruin without perceiving it : nor will they always avoid it, when they do perceive it. *A wise Man feareth, and departeth from Evil : but a Fool rageth, and is confident* *. At best, they often lose a Point of

* Prov. xiv. 16.

Consequence by their Warmth about a Trifle : disoblige in a Fit of Peevishness their most zealous Friends, and sometimes turn them into the most dangerous Adversaries. For past Intimacies furnish peculiar Means of doing Hurt for the future : and a *Brother offended is harder to be won, than a strong City*^b. Then, at the same Time that they provoke needless Enmities, they give all their Enemies needless Advantages : often betraying their own Designs, perpetually forwarding those of their Opposers. For while they rashly press on upon others, they lay themselves open without Defence, and verify the Saying of the wise King : *He that hath no Rule over his own Spirit, is like a City that is broken down, and without Walls*^c. Nothing requires more Coolness, than what usually raises the most Heat : meeting with unreasonable Opposition. They who cannot pass by small Injuries unnoticed, will generally draw down great ones upon their own Heads. For Anger on such Occasions, however just, serves only to make bad People worse, and afford them Handles for doing more effectually what they wish. *Kindle not therefore the Coals of a Sinner, lest thou be*

^b Prov. xviii. 19.

^c Prov. xxv. 28.

burnt with the Flame of his Fire. Rise not up in Anger at the Presence of an injurious Person, lest he lie in wait to intrap thee in thy Words.

Another grievous Disadvantage of a passionate Temper is, that it hinders Men from receiving Advice. Not every one dares, and no one hath Encouragement, to give it them. For they will seldom bear the Intimation of an Error in what they do, or an Objection to what they propose. Nay, too commonly, alledging Reasons against a Thing, increases their Positiveness in Favour of it. For Anger joins the two unfittest Companions in the World, Rashness and Obstinacy. Or, if good Counsel chances to be once followed, the same Impatience, which hath brought them into one Difficulty, will soon bring them into another, as bad. So that, to use *Solomon's Words*, *a Man of great Wrath shall suffer Punishment : for if thou deliver him, yet thou must do it again*^e. What usually inflames our Resentments is the Desire of promoting our own Schemes and Interests. Now, on the contrary, this is the very Inducement, which should moderate and check them. For however triumphantly out-

^d Eccclus. viii. 10, 11.

^e Prov. xix. 19.

rageous People may seem to bear down all before them for a Time : yet it is ever the cool Head, that carries the Point at last. *Better is the End of a Thing, than the Beginning thereof : and the patient in Spirit is better than the proud in Spirit. Be not hasty in thy Spirit to be angry : for Anger resteth in the Bosom of Fools*¹. But supposing Persons of this Turn to have at Heart, not their own private Interest, but public Good : very often their Heat will mislead them to do Evil instead of it ; and that, most dreadful Evil. For the strong Impression of being in the Right, under which they act, inclines them to run greater Lengths in what is wrong, than any Thing else could. And thus *the Wrath of Man worketh not*, even when he may intend it, *the Righteousness of God*². Indeed were a Design ever so well chosen, and harmlessly carried on, yet few Things are so likely to hinder the Success of it, as too great Vehemence : which hath also this further Inconvenience, that after they, whom it animates, have spent their first Fire, they are the aptest of all others to flag and despair, and abandon their Undertaking.

But, besides that we thus embarrass and dis-

¹ Eccl. vii. 8, 9.

² James i. 20.

appoint ourselves, we ought to reflect, what Sort of Figure we make to others. Generally People endeavour to hide their Frailties : *but he that is hasty of Spirit*, proclaims his ; and, as the Scripture expresses it, *exalteth Folly*ⁿ. He aims at the Appearance indeed of great Importance and Superiority : and would have it pass for inward Strength, that he exerts himself so immoderately. But unreasonable Passions are no more a Proof of healthy Vigour in the Soul, than Fevers or Convulsions are in the Body. Every little Accident affects and flutters an infirm Constitution : while those of a juster Make bear considerable Changes undisturbed. In the same Manner a rightly tempered Mind repulses even great Assaults without Effort, and remains unmoved ; while the slightest Trials put a weak one into remarkable Agitations. Persons of the tenderest Frames, of the smallest Experience and Knowledge, of the lowest or the most impaired Faculties, have usually the least Command of themselves, when provoked. Nor doth the sudden Fierceness, with which Resentment inspires Men, at all imply true Bravery, though it may accidentally produce some Effects like

ⁿ Prov. xiv. 29.

it : for this even Extremity of Fear will do. Then further, excessive Anger is attended with all imaginable Symptoms of Weakness. For it makes the wisest People say and act the silliest Things that can be ; and become quite ridiculous, whilst they aim to appear terrible : threatening what they dare not do, attempting what they cannot do, and what, when the mad Fit is a little over, for the World they would not, if they could : exposing themselves by the most wretched false Reasonings ; laying great Stress upon Trifles, that will bear none at all ; and, when one wild Assertion is confuted, running instantly to another to justify their Choler, and all in vain. So pitious is the Figure, that the passionate make : and it is often a lasting Shame, which the blustering Affectation of false Greatness brings upon them in a few Moments. Composure is an essential Part of true Dignity : and an elevated Soul is above taking Notice of the impotent Attacks, which a mean one shews its Meanness by busying itself to resent and return.

Some Sort of exorbitant Anger indeed is far from deserving Contempt : but in Proportion as it ceases to be despicable, it becomes hateful. Nay, it hath often both these bad Qualities

lities at once. The little Fretfulness that goes no further than peevish Words at every Turn, though an Object of Derision, yet breaks grievously in upon the Quiet of Life, and Freedom of Conversation: puts every one, that comes near the Person subject to it, under very disagreeable Restraints; and usually to small Purpose. For the least Incident of a thousand shall be sufficient to turn his highest good Humour into a furious Rage, a perverse Captiousness, or a sullen Silence: while he himself doth not know, or is ashamed to tell, at what he is offended; and yet, like a forward Child, grows the more unmanageable for the Pains taken to please him. This must cause Uneasiness to all that see it: but some have a Tenderness of Mind, that makes them feel it acutely. They fear they have done amiss, and search in vain for what can have given such great Disgust. But especially they, who have either any Affection for such an unreasonable Person, or any Interest depending on his Regard for them, must be perpetually miserable with him. So that, when these Wretches do no worse, they perplex and disquiet every one about them; and those most, to whom they should be the kindest. But

when their Passion bursts forth with any uncommon Degree of Vehemence, then it hath Effects yet more serious: the most grating and disobliging Things are said, that can be invented; Failings unmercifully exposed; cruel Imputations, though known to be false, injuriously made; Secrets divulged, that ought to have been for ever hidden; Promises broken, that should have been kept inviolably: and all this, merely because an inconsiderate Creature is pleased to be in a Rage, perhaps without a Shadow of Ground for it.

Thus even the more transitory Fits of Anger hurry Men into Behaviour extremely wicked: and a Storm of Fury, that possibly doth not last a Quarter of an Hour, destroys or grievously diminishes the Comfort of another, it may be through all his Days. But when their Displeasure takes deeper Root, and infects the Temper with a settled ill Will; then they will make it the Business of their Lives to depress and sit heavy upon the Object of their Malignity, to frustrate his most equitable Expectations, and follow him about with unwearied Labours to blast the Success of every Thing, which he undertakes. Neither Generosity, nor Humanity, nor Goodness of Character,

rafter, nor Nearness of Relation, nor Greatness of Favours received, can extinguish their Resentment : which sometimes conceals itself under specious Pretences and smiling Appearances, watching the Opportunity of some effectual Mischief ; at others, incapable of Disguise, it blazes forth in open Violence ; Laws and Punishments, human and divine, are unable to deter them, and nothing short of immediate Destruction will assuage their Hatred. How pernicious must People of this Character be in Society ; how dangerous must they appear in the Eyes of Men, how guilty in the Sight of God ! Guilty, not only of all the Evil, which they have directly done ; but all, which they have either incited others to do for them, or provoked others to do against them. For *an angry Man stirreth up Strife, and a furious Man aboundeth in Transgression*ⁱ.

The Misbehaviours and cross Accidents, of which this World is full, were intended to exercise those Virtues of Meekness and Patience, which the next World is intended to reward. But to use the Vexations of Life as Opportunities to run mad and do Mischief, is acting contrary to the whole Design of our

ⁱ Prov. xxix. 22.

Maker; contrary to the native Tendernefs of our own Hearts, to our Confciousnefs of human Frailties, to the Pity we ought to feel for the Miferies of human Circumftances; contrary to the Dictates of Natural Religion, which requires us to imitate the Goodnefs we adore, and to the moft exprefs Precepts of Chriftianity, which allows us not the leaft Hope of God's Mercy on any other Condition, than this, that *if we forgive Men their Trefpaffes, our heavenly Father will alfo forgive us*^k.

But here fome will plead, that however hurtful to ourfelves or others this Paflion may be, it cannot be fo finful as it hath been represented, becaufe it is often involuntary. And fome Degrees of it, we muft own, feem to be fo: and the Temptations of our corrupt Nature to very blameable Degrees are often exceedingly ftrong. But ftill in fuch Cafes we are ftrangely willing to believe much lefs to be in our Power, than, by the Help of God's Grace, is. And the Way to know, how far it really extends, will be, not to imagine about it, and lament that we cannot do what in Truth we can do very well: but to try, and that by the Ufe of proper Means. For they,

^k Matth. vi. 14.

who are totally unable to check their Passion by an immediate Effort of their Mind at the Time, had they governed themselves rightly before, perhaps would scarce have felt any Passion to check. And therefore I shall now proceed in Conclusion,

III. To direct, how excessive Anger may best be avoided.

Now the great general Rule for this and every good Purpose is, to obtain from God, by reading his Holy Word, by Meditation and Prayer, the Spirit of Love to him and to our Neighbour. In Proportion as that *rules in our Hearts*¹, we shall be humble and meek, live as being always in his Presence, fear to offend him, desire to please him, labour to imitate him : we shall think often and seriously what great Provocations from us our heavenly Father hath passed over, through so long a Course of Years ; what shocking Indignities our blessed Redeemer underwent contentedly and silently for our Sakes ; with what persevering Patience the Holy Ghost offers to us his sanctifying Influences, notwithstanding all we do to grieve him ; how effectually pious Men, in all Ages, have been moved by these Benefits

¹ Col. iii. 15.

to copy the divine Long-suffering : we shall learn to bear with our Fellow-Sinners, with whom the Almighty bears : we shall call to Mind, that he hath made them of the same Blood, united them into the same Body under Christ our Head, strives with them by the same Spirit : we shall recollect, that he commands us to forgive each others Trespases and promote each others Happiness, and will treat us as we treat our Brethren : that all the Vexations which befall us here, if we go through them with the Temper, which we ought, instead of doing us the least Harm, shall unspeakably augment our Felicity hereafter ; and that by all the Injuries, which others do us, however they may triumph in them at present, they are only *heaping Coals of Fire on their own Heads*^m : a Consideration, that surely should melt our Anger into Pity, and induce us never to go a Step farther in Correction or Resentment, than Security requires ; but leave Vengeance to him, whose it is. Thus then from the two inseparable Commandments of Love to God and Man, flow inestimable Motives to mild Sentiments and gentle Behaviour, by which pious and Christian

^m Rom. xii. 20.

Minds will be powerfully influenced; experiencing not only their natural Force, but the additional Efficacy of Divine Grace, annexed to the Use of them. And there is no other radical Cure of irregular Passions. But still, together with this universal Medicine, there are several auxiliary and appropriated Rules of Regimen during our Continuance in the Course of it, to be followed, and therefore needful to be specified.

One is, that we avoid forming refined and romantic Notions of human Perfection in any Thing. For these are much apter to heighten our Expectations from others, and our Demands upon them, than to increase our Watchfulness over ourselves: and so every Failure provokes us more highly, than it would have done else. A Sense of Things, too delicate for our Nature, and the State in which we live, is no Accomplishment, but an Infirmary. And overstrained Notions of Friendship or Honour, or any virtuous Attainment, constantly do Harm. For if we fancy ourselves arrived at these Heights; we shall resent it as Profanation, when the rest of the World treat us as being nearly on the Level with them, which yet they certainly will. And if we go

to measure those around us by these Ideas ; we shall look on Persons, whenever we have a Mind to do so, as Monsters not to be supported, who, in a reasonable Way of thinking, would appear very tolerably good People. We should therefore endeavour, by frequent Reflection, to form a Habit of judging with Moderation concerning our Neighbours and ourselves. Man is a fallen Being, defective in his Understanding, and depraved in his Inclinations ; placed in Circumstances, in which many Things call him off from what he should do, many Things prompt him to what he should not do ; and often, before he hath well learned to distinguish one from the other, or too suddenly for him to apply the Distinction rightly.

Now only reflect, when a Multitude of such Creatures as these are put to live together, with Interests and Appetites, Humours and Fancies, interfering every Hour ; what a Number of wrong Actions must of Course be continually done, and some of them very wrong : which yet may be attended with such Alleviations, that even a superior faultless Nature, looking down upon our Earth, would by no Means impute all that was amiss, as heinous Guilt to the Persons that did it. This however is no Reason,
why

why we should indulge ourselves in Failings : for wilful Indulgence is always criminal. But it is a strong Reason, why we should not be bitter against others, on finding them such, as we had Cause to expect they would be ; but receive a large Share of Uneasiness from them contentedly, and a small one, with Thankfulness that it is no greater ; especially considering, what we can never bear in Mind too much, that no one of us is that superior faultless Nature, which I have been supposing ; but each of us a poor frail Being, with the Seeds in him at least of all the vile Actions, that we charge upon others : and on the Whole perhaps as bad, perhaps even worse than some of those, at whom we are so vehemently exasperated.

Almost every one is apt to join some Notion of peculiar Dignity to his own Person : and to imagine, that Offences are greatly aggravated by being committed against him : that his Character and Concerns, his Family and Friends, his Opinions and Taste, ought to be treated with a singular Degree of Regard. But then really we should remember, that Multitudes besides may just as allowably think the same Thing of theirs ; indeed that all Men are as dear to themselves, as we can be to ourselves : which

brings us back so far upon the Level again. And the serious Consideration of it must surely convince us, that our common Interest, as well as Duty, is, to think and act mildly; that *Pride was not made for Man, nor furious Anger for them that are born of a Woman* ^a.

Other Directions must be given more briefly. One is not to indulge ourselves in any Sort of over great Niceness and Delicacy: for it hardly ever gives real Pleasure, and it furnishes perpetual Occasions of Disgust and Fretfulness. Another is, to avoid Inquisitiveness after Materials for Anger to work upon. It is better not to hear of every little wrong Thing that is done about us, or said of us. And therefore we should never encourage Persons in the Officiousness of acquainting us with them needlessly: but always have some Suspicion of such as are peculiarly forward in it. For innumerable are the Friendships and agreeable Acquaintances that have been broken off, and the Resentments and Animosities raised, by Tales and Insinuations of this Kind, either wholly or in Part false; or idle and trifling, though true. Two other important Rules, and closely connected, are: first, never to engage by

^a Ecclus. x. 18.

Choice in more Business, than we can easily manage; for that, by causing Hurry and frequent Miscarriages, will certainly cause Vexation and Peevishness: then, to preserve a steady Attention to what we do engage in. Men are often grossly negligent of their Affairs: and afterwards furiously angry at those Disorders in them, for which they themselves are almost, if not quite, as much to blame, as others. Now regular Care would have prevented Mismanagement: which alternate Fits of Remissness and Rage will never do. Indeed we should obviate, as far as we can, every Thing, that we find apt to ruffle our Minds: and carry the Precaution down even to our Diversions and Amusements. For some of these have often so very bad an Effect upon the Temper, that not to apply so easy a Remedy as laying them aside, is really inexcusable. Another material Thing to be shunned, is Familiarity with passionate Persons: not only for the very plain Reason, lest they should provoke us, but also lest their Example should infect us. *Make no Friendship with an angry Man, and with a furious Man thou shalt not go: lest thou learn his Ways, and get a Snare to thy Soul*°. But to converse with those, who

† Prov. xxii. 24.

are of mild Dispositions, to observe how they take Things, and be advised by them how we should take them, will be of unspeakable Service.

These are Preparations before Danger. When it approaches near, the main Point is, to recollect, how dreadful it would be to give Way and lose ourselves, and to resolve that we will not. Towards keeping this Resolution we shall find it one great Preservative, though it may seem a slight Matter, not to let the Accent of our Speech, or any one of our Gestures be vehement. For these Things excite Passion mechanically : whereas a *soft Answer*, the Scripture tells us, *turneth away Wrath* ^p : composes the Spirit of the Giver himself, as well as the Receiver of it. Also making Use of the gentlest and least grating Terms, that we can, will be extremely beneficial : and accordingly it follows there, that *grievous Words stir up Anger*.

But if such begin to present themselves, and struggle for Vent, we must resolve to utter as few of any Sort as possible : or, if it become requisite, none at all : but shut fast the Door of our Lips, *till the Mastiff within hath done barking*, as is related to have been the Practice

^p Prov. xv. i.

of *Socrates* ⁹. It is a painful Restraint : but if we will remain Masters of ourselves, it is absolutely necessary. For one hasty Expression bursting out, makes freer Way for another : till at last the Banks are levelled, and the Torrent carries all before it. *A patient Man therefore will bear for a Time, and afterwards Joy shall spring up unto him. He will hide his Words for a Time, and the Lips of many shall declare his Wisdom* ^r. But above all, we should inviolably observe never to act in a Heat. Thoughts, alas, will be too quick for us : a few improper Words may escape : but Actions are much more in our Power. We may be too angry at present to venture upon acting at all : a little Delay can do no Harm, and may do a great deal of Good. Only when we take Time, we should make a right Use of it : not revolve an insignificant Offence in our Minds, interpret little Incidents with perverse Acuteness, and lay Stress upon groundless Fancies, till we work it up into a heinous Crime. The best Understandings, without good Tem-

⁹ Προς δε το μη συναρπαδηναι συνεργει τα μεγαλα ειδηνηαι — σιωπανεως αντης ενδοθεν αναζεσεως αιδημεθα κατασλαησης, και ο εν ημιν κυων μηκετι υλακτη. Λεγεται γυν και Σωκρατης, ειποτε θυμωθει, παντως σιωπων. Simpl. in Epict. c. 28. p. 135. Comp. Cic. ad Quintum fratrem, l. 1. ep. 1. §. 13.

^r Ecclus. i. 23, 24.

pers, can go the greatest Lengths in this Way : and employing their Reflection to excite the Displeasure, which it ought to restrain, the longer they ruminate, the more untractable they grow. Now Passion may be trusted very safely to suggest all the aggravating Circumstances. Reason therefore should be called in, only to represent the alleviating Considerations : of which we perpetually overlook so many and so important ones, that we should give those about us all possible Encouragement to remind us of them. And if the Person, by whom we think ourselves aggrieved, be one, with whom we have any close Connection, or of whom we have Ground to think advantageously ; laying our Complaint mildly before him, and hearkening impartially to his Answer, may very possibly set all right, and place us on a better Footing, than ever we were before.

Admonish a Friend : it may be he hath not done it ; and if he have done it, that he do it no more.

Admonish thy Friend : it may be he hath not said it ; and if he have, that he speak it not again.

Admonish a Friend : for many Times it is a Slander ; and believe not every Tale. There is one, that slippeth in his Speech ; but not from his Heart : and who is he, that hath not offended

with his Tongue? Admonish thy Neighbour, before thou threaten him: and, not being angry, give Place to the Law of the most High *. Only this Caution ought to be observed in the Case, that such, as are naturally warm and impatient, should but seldom risk a personal Explanation at first: but rather employ some common Well-wisher; on whose Probity and Prudence they can safely depend, that he will moderate, not inflame, Matters by interposing. And when thus, or any Way, the Subject of Difference is rightly stated: if the other Party be innocent, let us admit it with Pleasure; if he own his Fault, though not so fully as he should, let us receive his Acknowledgement with Generosity. And if, in Return, he brings a Charge against us: let us say with Calmness what we have to say justly in our own Favour; confess frankly, with due Concern, whatever hath been amiss; and where there is no Room for a Defence, attempt no Palliation; but follow the Injunction of Scripture: *If thou hast done foolishly, or if thou hast thought Evil, lay thine Hand upon thy Mouth* †. It will be very dishonourable, and very strange in him, to treat us unkindly upon this. But if he doth, we

* Ecclus. xix. 13—17.

† Prov. xxx. 32.

must submit patiently to what we have brought upon ourselves ; and not be guilty of a second Misdemeanour, because our first is not handsomely forgiven us.

These Rules we shall, every one of us, more or less, violate. But then, through God's Grace, we may turn even our Transgressions of them to our Benefit, by gaining such experimental Knowledge of ourselves, as will supply us with specific Directions fitted to our own Case ; and on that Account far surer to be successful at last, than any more general ones, that can be prescribed to us by others.

And now, after thus delivering Rules for the Prevention or Cure of unwarrantable Resentment, both which are Works of no small Difficulty, let me add in Conclusion, that all around us ought to assist us in them : and particularly, by conscientiously abstaining from throwing in our Way any Temptations to that Sin. The intemperate Heat of the passionate is very blameable : but the deliberate Wickedness of the cool and artful, who rouse them into Passion, is abominable : and even the sportful Teazings of malicious Mirth, when employed against such, deserve no slight Censure. *St. Paul* twice admonishes Parents, *not*

to provoke their Children to Wrath ^u: probably because it might be likely to give an early wrong Turn to their tender Minds. Now, if it be unlawful to excite a short-lived Anger in these, who are many of them incapable of doing Hurt, be they ever so angry; how great a Crime is it to stir up Rage, where the Consequence may be unknown Mischief of various Sorts: and how excellent a Duty, to take every Opportunity, (and we have all of us frequently such) for disposing the Hearts of those about us to that Spirit of Meekness and universal Goodwill, which is the Qualification for Happiness here and hereafter! *The Fruit of Righteousness is sown in Peace of them that make Peace* ^v. *Sow to yourselves in Righteousness, and reap in Mercy* ^x.

^u Eph. vi. 4. Col. iii. 21. ^v James iii. 18. ^x Hof. x. 12.

S E R M O N VI.

MATTH. ii. 16.

Then Herod, when he saw, that he was mocked of the wise Men, was exceeding wroth; and sent forth, and slew all the Children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the Coasts thereof, from two Years old and under; according to the Time, which he had diligently enquired of the wise Men.

THE piteous History, contained in these Words, is the Sequel of that, immediately preceding, which informs us, that, on the Birth of our Saviour in *Judea*, some Gentiles of Learning and Distinction came from the East to *Jerusalem*, by divine Direction, to pay him Homage: on which, *Herod* the King, understanding that the *Messiah* was to be born at *Bethlehem*, sent them thither to find him; with a Charge to bring him Notice of the Place

Place where the Child was, that he also might do him the same Honour ; designing really to destroy him, instead of paying him Respect : but that, *being warned of God, not to return to Herod, they departed into their own Country another Way*^a.

The sad Consequences which followed their Departure, are mentioned in the Words of the Text ; and present to us a Transaction of so remarkable a Nature as well deserves a particular Examination into it, and an Explanation of the several Circumstances attending it. This is what I mean to give you in the following Discourse : and if, in doing it, I should be led to spend more Time, in Proportion, than usual, on Points not immediately belonging to the great Articles of Christian Faith or Practice ; you will remember, that we ought to understand, not only the Doctrines and Precepts, but the History of the Gospel : especially as in the present unbelieving Age, Objections are too frequently made against the several Parts of it, in their Turns ; and as a due Consideration of every Part, will not only confirm us in the Truth of it, but furnish abundantly more Matter of pious and moral

^a Ver. 12.

Reflection, than at the first View it may seem to afford.

The Text begins with acquainting us, that *Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise Men, was exceeding wroth*. Not that they had any Design of provoking him, or exposing him to Contempt. That is not the Behaviour of good Persons to the very worst. He had commanded them indeed to *bring him Word again*, where the Child was : but probably had too haughtily presumed on their Compliance, though not his Subjects, to think of asking a Promise of them. Or, had they made one, as they naturally enough might, with a full Purpose of keeping it ; the Warning, received from God, must entirely have superseded that Obligation : of which, other Things also might have hindered the Performance. But unreasonable and vehement Spirits hardly ever stay to inquire into such Matters : whatever disappoints them, appears to them an Indignity. And accordingly *Herod* was not only sorry, that his Intention was frustrated, but *exceeding wroth* : imagined it no Sin at all to contrive the Murder of the harmless Child whose Birth had been notified to him ; but an intolerable Offence, that the wise Men should, whatever

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their Reason was, fail to be made his Instruments for accomplishing it.

And now, his Wickedness increasing as his Rage boiled within him, rather than miss of committing the one Crime, which alone he designed at first, he resolves to commit he knows not how many more of the like Sort, without any other Pretext for them : imagining that the Object of his Apprehensions continued still in the same Place. On that Imagination solely, either having first inquired after him in vain, (for he was removed by the Direction of God) or conceiving, that no certain Information would be obtained by a Person so abhorred as he knew himself to be, and that taking Time for a Search was giving Time for an Escape ; he forms the shocking Resolution of killing all the Children of *Bethlehem*, and its Territory ; unmoved by Conscience, or Compassion, or Fear of Revenge, or the Detestation of Mankind, in order to make sure of killing that Child, from which, of all others, he ought to have abstained, the long-expected *Hope of Israel*^b, the great promised Blessing to that Religion, which he himself professed. This direful Purpose he orders to be put in im-

^b Acts xxviii. 20.

mediate Execution : too many find their Interest in obeying his Will : no one hath Power, or Courage, to resist it : the Deed is done : the poor Infants miserably slain.

No Wonder, that *then*, as St. *Matthew* observes, *was fulfilled*, that is, verified anew, more eminently and literally, *what was spoken* originally on a different Occasion, by *Jeremy the Prophet*, saying : *In Rama*, a town of *Benjamin*, adjoining to *Bethlehem* of *Judah*, which Tribes were therefore probably mixed here, as well as at *Jerusalem* and other Places ; *In Rama*, a Voice was heard, Lamentation and Weeping and great Mourning : *Rachel*, the Mother of *Benjamin*, weeping, that is, in the Persons of her female Descendants, *for her Children* ; and would not be comforted, because they are not : are not any longer in this World, for a Comfort and Joy to their Friends ; but taken away, to their inexpressible Affliction, by a Stroke of Violence, the most unexpected, the most afflicting and desolating, the most exquisitely painful and insupportable, that can be conceived.

Some perhaps may be tempted almost to doubt, whether a human Creature be capable of such Barbarity. But, alas, we cannot tell,

to what Degree our own Dispositions might be depraved, were we to give ourselves up to Iniquity, and provoke a just God to withdraw his Grace from us. Much less can we be sure what amazing Abominations others may come to harbour within their Breasts. *The Heart of Man is deceitful above all Things, and desperately wicked: who can know it c?* But especially the Hearts of Tyrants, grown old in the Possession and Exercise of absolute Power, accustomed by Flattery and Pride to think themselves of a higher Species than the rest of Mankind, hardened to Executions and Slaughter by long Use, become suspicious of every Person and Thing, by Experience of the Falseness of others, and Consciousness of their own; and habituated to hate their Subjects, as knowing that they are hated by them. Now such, if ever Man was, *Herod* was. His whole History, written not by a Christian, but a Jew, fully proves, that no Degree of Cruelty was improbable concerning one of a Nature so savage: who, besides the fierce Wars, in which his boundless Ambition engaged him, was committing Murders in cold Blood throughout his Life; of his nearest Relations amongst others,

c Jer. xvii. 9.

even of his own Children ; every one of them from Motives of State-Jealousy, the very Inducement that prompted him to the Inhumanity charged on him in the Text : and was so far from relenting at the Approach of Death, which commonly inspires less hardened Sinners with Penitence and Mildness, that he caused a large Number of his principal Subjects to be assembled ; and putting them under Confinement, bound those about him by an Oath, to massacre them all, as soon as he should expire ; that the Nation might mourn for his Decease on that Account, which on all others, he knew, would rejoice ^d. It is in vain to say of such a one, that he shewed on many Occasions a great Concern for his Reputation : and therefore was not likely to commit so monstrous a Murder, as that of these Children. He did so, when he could gratify his Vanity, without prejudicing his imaginary Interests : but never else. And therefore his proceeding without Mercy in this Case, far from being incredible, is only an Evidence, that the Expectations of the Messiah's coming at that Time were great and general ; and his own Apprehensions of it inexpressibly strong.

^d Joseph. Ant. l. xvii. c. 6. §. 5. Bell. Jud. l. i. c. 33. §. 6.

But still it may be wondered, if *Herod* was guilty of so execrable a Deed, that no ancient Historian should record it, and paint it in its due Colours, as they have done many Things, which deserved it less: but should all, excepting *St. Matthew*, omit the Mention of it *. Now, in Truth, there is no ancient Heathen Historian of those Times extant, besides *Suetonius*: whose Work is only a brief Account of the Lives of the twelve *Cæsars*; in which a Narrative of this Kind is by no Means to be expected. And, were all the Historians of that Age remaining; *Judea* lay at the Extremity of the *Roman Empire*, nor was, in *Herod's* Reign, a Province of it, properly speaking: the smaller internal Affairs therefore of such a petty District would be little regarded, amidst so many of greater Importance. And, though the Murder of a Number of innocent Babes excites in us, with the utmost Reason, the strongest Pity and Horror; yet, alas, the Case was far otherwise during the Days of Pagan Darkness; when, in the most civilized Nations, Parents destroyed, or exposed to Destruction, their own Children, at

* *Joseph Scaliger* is said to have denied the Genuineness of this Part of *St. Matthew*. *Anselmi* hath defended it, in a Book, intitled, *Herodiani Infanticidii vindicæ*, 4^o, Brixiae, 1747.

Pleasure, how strange soever it may seem, without Scruple and without Punishment.

But further, it doth not appear, that any other old Authors ever did write the Life of *Herod*, or the History of his Reign, than *Nicolas of Damascus*, and *Josephus*. Now the Work of the former is lost. And he was not only a Courtier and domestic Friend of *Herod*, but was employed as Embassador to *Augustus*, to defend him in his Life-time, and his Character after his Death, from Imputations of Tyranny and Cruelty, brought before that Emperor by the Jewish Nation ^f. This Man therefore neither would be inclined to relate such Things of him in his Book; nor could do it indeed, without condemning himself for having been his Apologist. Besides, he was so shamefully partial to him, as to deduce his Genealogy from a noble *Hebrew* Family; though it was notorious, that his Father was an *Edomite* ^g.

As for *Josephus*: He wrote at the Distance of above 90 Years after the Fact: which we are apt to consider, as taking away many more Lives, than probably it did. *Bethlehem* was not a large Place: whether its Territory was,

^f Joseph. Ant. l. xvi. c. 9. §. 4. & c. 10. §. 8. & l. xvii. c. 5. §. 4 & c. 11. §. 3. & Bell. Jud. l. ii. c. 6. §. 2.

^g Joseph. Ant. l. xiv. c. 1. §. 3.

we know not. The Order given could be only against the Male Children. *Herod*, we are told, slew all these, under a certain Age : that is, all whom the Messengers of his bloody Purpose found. But possibly, going on so shocking an Errand, they might not be desirous of executing their Orders with the utmost Secrecy and Strictness. Or, if they were ; the Alarm, once taken, would quickly spread ; and a considerable Proportion undoubtedly be carried away, or concealed. The fabulous Legends tell us indeed of vast Multitudes killed : but alledge no sufficient Proof of their Assertions ⁿ. And the wiser Authors, even of the Popish Communion, disregard and ridicule them. Now, supposing the Number of the slaughtered Infants to be small ; the Memory of what a few Villagers had suffered, might easily, when Printing was unknown, and Writing not near so common as now, be, in much less Time than 90 Years, quite buried under the Stories of the many large Executions, which the Tyrant had made, of Persons more noted.

ⁿ *Jerom* saith, *Herodes, Scribæ & Pharisei, pro uno infante multa parvulorum millia trucidarunt.* Com. in *Is.* l. 3. c. 7. vol. 4. p. 112. Ed. Veron. But he lived about 400 Years after the Time. And as he asserts, what the least Reflection would have shewn him was false, that the Scribes and Pharisees were guilty of this Fact, he deserves no Credit in what lay more out of his Knowledge.

Or it might be industriously stifled by the unbelieving Jews, to prevent it from being of Service to the Cause of Christianity. Or indeed it might be utterly overwhelmed by the total Destruction of their Country, with the Slaughter of Millions, which had happened before *Josephus* began to compile Materials for his Book. It is therefore extremely possible, that this Massacre, though perfectly true, might never come to his Ears : or, if it did, yet not with any Certainty. And, if his Information about it seemed to him rather doubtful, he did wisely in passing it over.

But supposing him ever so sure of it ; he might think proper only to involve it covertly in a general Account of the Butcheries of *Herod* about this Time ; occasioned, as he saith, which is exceedingly remarkable, by the Expectation of a new King ⁱ. For he might be unwilling, or even afraid, to offend the Posterity of that Monarch, with one of whom, *Agrippa*, he was intimate, by the express Relation of a Barbarity so unmanly : and might think, that he had sufficiently given his Readers to understand *Herod's* Character, without say-

ⁱ Ant. l. xvii. c. 2. §. 4.

ing more ^k. If the Testimony concerning our Saviour, ascribed to him, be genuine; his omitting to name these Children will be an Objection of small Weight against the Gospel History. And if that Testimony be not genuine; it will be no Wonder in the least, that he, who, for the Sake of paying Court to *Vespasian*, as the foretold *Messiah*, could suppress the Mention of *Jesus*, and his Miracles, should avoid to record a Fact, which must have brought the same *Jesus* in View, under that Character; and *Bethlehem*, as the Place where the Messiah should be born ^l. He hath been silent, in other Parts of his Work, for much less Reasons, about many considerable Things, of which he must have known the Truth ^m. Indeed it is so frequent in all Histories for one Author to pass over Things, even of great Consequence, which another relates, that, if this were to be made

^k *Josephus*, in his own Life, §. 65. saith, “It is necessary, that a Historian should write Truth: but he may allowably avoid charging on some Persons their ill Actions with Bit-
“terness; not for their Sakes, but for that of his own Mode-
“ration.” But he saith this, not in relation to *Herod*, but to excuse himself for not having expostulated till then with *Justus*, on the Falshoods contained in his History of the Jewish War, published before that of *Josephus*.

^l Perhaps for a like Reason *Justus* never mentioned the Christians, though they made no contemptible Figure then in *Palestine*.

^m See *Outii Spicileg.* in *Joseph.*

a Ground of Suspicion concerning the Articles thus omitted ; scarce any Author could preserve his Credit, and certainly not *Josephus* : for in very much of what he delivers, he stands entirely single, and unsupported. Another material Consideration is, that as he wrote long after *St. Matthew*, whose Gospel must have been well known in *Judea* ; he might, and surely would, have contradicted him in this Point, if he could : which he hath not.

It may be added further, that *Macrobius*, a *Roman* Writer, who lived indeed a considerable Time after both of them, in the Beginning of the fifth Century, but saith he compiled his Performance out of earlier Books ; and who, by putting *Syria* instead of *Bethlehem*, shews, he did not borrow this Part from the New Testament ; and who, being a Heathen, was not partial to the Gospel History ; mentions *Herod's* Murder of the Children, as a known Truth ⁿ. And his joining another Fact with it, which possibly happened at a Month's Distance from it, is by no Means enough to discredit his Testimony : which will be greatly confirmed, if we believe *Sixtus Senensis*, a

ⁿ See, concerning these Particulars, *Masson's* Appendix to *Bishop Chandler's* Vindication.

learned Man, who lived two Centuries ago, and saith he read the same Account with that of *Macrobius*, in a Part, now lost, of *Dion Cassius*, a Pagan Historian, 100 Years older than *Macrobius* *. A Book also, of uncertain Date, written in *Hebrew* by a most virulent Jew, admits *Herod* to have done this Deed †.

But whatever may be said concerning the Omission of it by others, possibly you may wonder, that all the Evangelists, excepting *St. Matthew*, should omit it. For they all relate the same Matters, in several Instances of less Moment: but then these were chiefly, if not solely, Matters which came to pass after our Saviour's public Teaching began, and at which they were present. *St. Luke* and *St. John* have each of them many Particulars, and even *St. Mark* hath some, which none of the rest have. And plainly no one of them undertook to publish a complete History of our Saviour's Life: but each wrote those Occurrences, which he knew or remembered best, or judged the most needful to be inserted in his Narrative. What the be-

* See Dr. Gregory Sharpe's Argument in Defence of Christianity, p. 41.

† *Toldoth Jeschu*, published by Huldrick at Leyden, 1705, 8vo. p. 11. 12. But perhaps he might take the Fact from *St. Matthew*, only perverting it, as he doth absurdly, to his own Purpose.

loved Disciple faith of his own Gospel, may be extended to each of the former. *Many other Things Jesus did*, (and doubtless other Persons did in Relation to him) *which are not written in this Book : but these are written, that ye may believe* ⁹. The Fact now before us was not the most necessary to be known. Had St. *Matthew* likewise been silent about it, our Faith would still have had abundantly sufficient Evidence. But when he had related it, there was less Need, that the Gospels, which came after, should. And perhaps the greater Wonder is, that so many such Things are repeated in them, than that so few are.

But hence arises one very natural and important Observation more : that St. *Matthew* could have no Temptation to forge a Story, which was no Way essential to his Design, and might have been so easily disproved when he wrote, if it was not true ; especially, as he is understood to have written in *Judea*. Or, if he had been so rash, the early Writers against Christianity would have charged him with it, and the early Writers for it endeavoured to defend him : and there is not the least Appearance of either.

⁹ John xx. 30, 31. xxi. 25.

Still one Circumſtance may ſeem attended with a Difficulty. Why ſhould *Herod* carry his Cruelty ſo far, as to ſlay all the Children *from two Years old and under*, when one Year, or half a Year, if not leſs, would have answered his End as well? Now here perhaps we commonly miſtake the Evangeliſt. For learned Men have held, that the original Word, tranſlated, *from two Years*, may mean, not, from two Years completed, but from two Years begun; from the Entrance into the ſecond Year. But if that be doubtful: yet *Herod*, notwithstanding that he inquired exactly, when the Star appeared to the wiſe Men, could not be ſure, nor they tell him, whether it appeared to them exactly at the Birth of the Child, or ſome Time after it. Nor do we know, how long it might be after that Appearance, that they were able to ſettle their Affairs and begin their Journey; nor from what Diſtance they came, nor what Hindrances might happen in their Way; nor what Stay they might make at *Jeruſalem* before *Herod* ſent for them; and then, before he diſmiſſed them: nor conſequently, how old the Child was when they ſaw him. The Slaughter of the Innocents

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is appointed in our Calendar to be commemorated three Days 'after the Nativity. If that was supposed to be the real Time, the Meaning must have been, not to place it, or the Coming of the wise Men, preposterously, before the Appearance of the Star, which is fixed in our Calendar to the Twelfth Day, but to place it almost a Year after. And if the Child could either in Reality, or in *Herod's* Imagination, be almost a Year old ; a Wretch of such unspeakable Jealousy as he was, and whose express Character it is, in the Jewish Historian, rather to go too far in his Fears and Suspicions, than fall short ', would by no Means think it safe, especially in his Passion, to give an Order extending to much less than two Years.

These, I think, are all the Objections and Doubts, that can well be raised in Relation to this Part of the Gospel Narrative. And if any of them hath received a more satisfactory Answer, than it was beforehand imagined could be given ; a modest and equitable Mind will be ready to conclude, that other Scripture Difficulties also may in all Likelihood be fairly solved, whether the particular Manner of doing it appear at present, or not.

^c Ant. l. xvi. c. 8. §. 2.

It will now be asked, What Use we are to make of this Piece of History? And here perhaps it may be worth while just to observe, that in the first Place we should be careful not to make a bad one. For a very bad and absurd one hath been derived down, though I hope not to many of the present Generation, from the Times of Popish Ignorance : in which Persons imagined, that the Day of the Week, on which Mass was annually performed in Honour of these Children, thence called *Childermass* Day, was an unlucky one throughout the Year, and unfit for the Beginning of any Business. But, what Shadow of Pretence is there, that, because we commemorate then *Herod's* doing a very wicked Thing, we should abstain from doing such right and proper Things, as fall in our Way? Not only this Fancy, but all of this Kind, are utterly without Foundation in Reason, Scripture, primitive Christianity, or daily Experience, if People will but mind what passes, with common Care and common Sense. They serve to no one good Purpose whatever : they fetter the Hands of Persons ; and disquiet their Minds with Superstitions, which, at the same Time, are profane and irreligious, Fears
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and Observances ; as if the Providence of God did not always equally watch over us in our lawful Undertakings ; but he had given some Days out of his own Hands into those of the wicked one. Weak Minds, it is true, may fall into such Errors inconsiderately without much Blame. But to cast them off, when you are warned of the Nature of them, is an evident Duty. I proceed to the proper Uses.

And surely one of them is, to observe, how pitiable they are, who live under the arbitrary Government of despotic Princes, that may do, as often as their Passions prompt them, the cruellest Actions without Controul ; and to thank God from the Bottom of our Hearts, that we live in a Land of Law and Liberty, where no such bloody Commands, as those of *Herod*, can be issued forth : but we enjoy securely whatever is dear to us ; and the meanest, while innocent, hath nothing to fear from the greatest. There are, at this Day, Countries in the World, where every thing lies at the Mercy of one bad Man : and on very slight Provocations, not only Children, but Men, Women and Children, are instantly destroyed at the Word of Command.

Another Point is, to take Notice, for a Caution to us, what amazing Lengths of Sin human Creatures are capable of going, unless they stop themselves at first; especially when Love of Power and Dominion hurries them on: and how possible it is, for the vilest of Designs to be covered, as *Herod* did his, with Pretences of the utmost Zeal for Religion. Nor should we omit to remark at the same Time, how painful the Agitations of an evil Heart must surely be, while it is working itself up to Resolutions and Deeds of such Horror, and how terrifying its Reflections afterwards. But especially we should dwell on this Meditation, which arises most naturally from the Subject before us, that opposing our own Wisdom to that of Heaven is the grossest of all Follies. Doubtless the crafty Monarch, when he gave out his Orders, applauded within himself more than a little the Prudence of this Master-Stroke: and despised the cowardly Politicians that have Scruples, and stop at half Way. But *why boastest thou thyself, thou Tyrant, that thou canst do Mischief, whereas the Goodness of God endureth yet daily?* Through that, wicked Men will always fail, either of the Point, at which they are aiming,

* Ps. lii. 1, 2.

or of the Happiness, which they expected from it. *Herod* failed even of the first. The Infants, whom he would have wished to spare, he destroyed: the Infant, whom alone he wished to destroy, escaped him. So he plunged himself into the deepest Guilt, and gave up his Memory to endless Infamy; and got nothing by it of what he hoped. Thus was he *mocked*, not so properly of the wise Men, though by Means of them, as of God himself; according to the Prediction, many Ages before, concerning him, and all resembling him. *Why do the Heathen so furiously rage together, and the People imagine a vain Thing? The Kings of the Earth stand up, and the Rulers take Counsel together against the Lord, and against his anointed.—He, that dwelleth in Heaven, shall laugh them to scorn: the Lord shall have them in Derision*. Nor was he disappointed only, which he might know in this Life, though we are not sure he did, but called soon after, in a dreadful and exemplary Manner, to his final Account: dying in all the Agonies of a Body tortured with a Complication of noisome Diseases, and a Soul driven to the Extremity of Fury and Despair: as the before-mentioned

^c Ps. ii. 1, 2, 4.

Historian, *Josephus*, whose Testimony in this Particular cannot be suspected, relates at large.

From such Dispensations of Providence as this, and from the gracious Promises of God's holy Word, his Church, though tenderly affected by the Wickedness of its Persecutors, as well as the frequent Sufferings of its Members, may yet learn to look beyond both, and contemplate with Triumph its own Security; the shameful Defeats of the former, and, even if they appear to succeed, the glorious Rewards of the latter. *The Virgin, the Daughter of Zion, hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn; the Daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her Head at thee* *. Hence the Days, on which the Apostles and others died Martyrs, have been joyfully observed as their Birth-Days: and shedding their Blood, considered as sowing Seed for the future Increase of Believers. Hence also the Memory of these Infants hath been celebrated in the Assemblies of Christians from the primitive Times: as we read in a Work, that hath been ascribed to *Origen*, who lived 1500 Years ago *. For their Murder was regarded as a Martyrdom undergone by them in Deed, though not in Will; since they

* Is. xxxvii. 22.

* Hom. 3. in diversos.

lost their Lives on Christ's Account, and, as the Collect of our Church for this Festival expresses it, *glorified God by their Deaths*; were instrumental in making the Birth of his Son, and his watchful Care of him, remarkable in the highest Degree. And thus, conformably to the Psalmist's Words *, inserted into the same Collect, God *ordained Strength*, gave additional Evidence to the Christian Faith, and by so doing, *perfected Praise* † to his holy Name, even from the dying Cries, which proceeded out of the Mouths of these Babes and Sucklings.

Let us therefore likewise pay due Regard to their Memory: and look on it as their unspeakable Happiness, that they were sent, on such an Account, by the Tyrant's Sword, to Heaven, in the Morning of their Days, secure from the Danger of living to be wicked here, and miserable hereafter. Let us also apply the same Consideration to any similar Affliction of our own: for we cannot undergo a severer, and few, if any, upon Earth, have ever undergone so severe a one, as that of the poor Parents of these Children. Let us recollect from this instructive Lesson, that the sharpest Sufferings may fall on the most innocent Per-

* Ps. viii. 2. † Matt. xxi. 16.

sons ; that the nearest of our Relations, and dearest of our Blessings, are God's Property more than our own ; but that, if he takes them from us, he not only can, but, unless it be our Fault, will, make us ample Amends in a better World : and that therefore, though we may lawfully mourn the Loss of them, yet we ought meekly to submit to it ; supported by the Hope of a blessed Resurrection for them and ourselves ; and applying to our own Case, in a higher Sense, what was originally said, perhaps in a lower, to *Rachel, weeping for her Children : Thus saith the Lord, Restrain thy Voice from weeping, and thine Eyes from Tears : for thy Work shall be rewarded, and they shall come again from the Land of the Enemy* *.

* Jer. xxxi. 15, 16.

S E R M O N VII.

PROVERBS xii. 22.

Lying Lips are Abomination to the Lord: but they, that deal truly, are his Delight.

NOtwithstanding the Advantages of Reason, the Condition of Mankind would be very low, and indeed very unhappy, if we did not also excell the rest of the Creatures, which inhabit this Earth, in a greater Power of communicating our Thoughts one to another. They have much fewer Wants: and are taught by Nature, almost immediately, how to supply them. But we are purposely formed to need and to give Help in every Thing, through the Whole of our Days: and therefore some ready and extensive Method of signifying mutually whatever passes within our Minds was peculiarly necessary for us. Without this, no Person would have more Knowledge of any

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Thing than he could attain of himself: or more Assistance in Distress from his Neighbour, than mere Conjecture would direct him to think needful, and unrequested Goodness incline him to bestow. The Pleasure also, as well as the Benefits of Society, would be reduced to a narrow Compass: and Life hang upon our Hands joyless and uncomfortable. But our gracious Maker hath furnished us with several Ways of doing what we find so requisite. Our Actions and Gestures declare our Meanings, in many Cases, both clearly and strongly: and our Looks have Significancy, inexpressible any other Way. The most intelligent of other Animals come not near us in either of these Respects. But yet articulate Speech, our more distinguishing Property, hath, on the Whole, much greater Pre-eminences belonging to it: and, together with the Improvement built upon it, of marking down Words with Ease in lasting Characters, hath raised us to a much higher Rank in the Scale of Beings, than we could otherwise have obtained.

Still unhappily, as every Blessing in the World may be fatally misused, so there is hardly any one bad Purpose, which Language, though granted for the most excellent good Purposes,

Purposes, may not be, and hath not been, perverted to serve. But it serves the most such, and the most effectually, by being turned from its original Design of giving right Information to those, with whom we converse, to the opposite one of leading them wrong : a Practice so immoral and mischievous, yet so common ; and so often seeming to be not only serviceable to the Deceivers themselves, but defensible, or however not very blameable, in Respect of such as they deceive ; that few Things are of more Importance, than forming just Notions concerning our Obligations to Veracity. And in doing this, though the principal Point is to restrain Men from taking over-great Liberties, yet they must be guarded also against over-great Scrupulousness : both because every Precept ought to be represented fairly ; and because, if this be not, some will be Sufferers by observing, and others feel Remorse for transgressing, imaginary Duties ; while much larger Numbers, perceiving the Rules given them to be in Part too strict, will take Occasion from thence to slight them all.

In order then to state this whole Subject, I shall,

I. Shew

I. Shew, what Things are to be reputed Lies, and what not.

II. Consider the Pleas, which are made to justify some Sorts of Lying.

III. Those, which are brought to excuse others.

I. The leading Question therefore is, what Things are to be reputed Lies, and what not. Now here,

1. Since Actions and Gestures, as well as Words, may be employed to express what we think ; they may be also employed to express what we do not think : which is the Essence of a Lie. Indeed some of our Actions are naturally significative : whereas few of our Words have any other Import, than arbitrary Consent and Usage give them ; as appears from the different Languages of different Nations. But then we have never consented to make our Actions in general Signs of our Intentions, as we have our Words. And if Persons interpret an Action of ours to mean this or that, which hath no certain Meaning affixed to it, we deceive them not, but they deceive themselves. Nor are we bound, in Point of Truth, to explain it, in order to prevent this : but in Point of Charity and Humanity we are, if we apprehend,

hend, that they may suffer any Harm by mistaking, which we can obviate without suffering proportionable Harm in their Stead. Such Actions therefore, as have no determinate Sense appropriated to them by Agreement, explicit or implied, can be no Violations of Sincerity: but such as have, are subject to just the same Rules with Words; and we may be guilty of as gross Falsehoods in the former, as in the latter.

2. Words having acquired their Significations by the mutual Acquiescence of Mankind, may change them by the same Method. And not only single Words may in Process of Time vary their Sense greatly, but Combinations of several Words may come to have Meanings, very different from what the Terms, of which they are composed, uninterpreted by Practice, would lead one to apprehend. We all know what it is to be *bumble*, and to be a *Servant* to any one. But a Person, who, in the common Acceptation of the Words, taken separately, cannot say he is either, may safely affirm that he is both, when they are joined together into an usual Declaration of mere Civility. And in general, whatever Form of Speech, though false in its primitive Sense, is true

true in that, which Custom hath adopted, may be used in it without Fault, to those who understand it right : for there can be no Lie, where we have no Purpose of deceiving. But still, though we may, and possibly in some Cases must, comply with such Phrases, when once they are established : yet the fewer of them prevail, the better, for several Reasons.

The high strained Expressions of Civility, which are so common, however innocent now, proceeded originally from a mean and fawning and fallacious Disposition in those who began them : and tended to nurse up Vanity and Haughtiness in those, to whom they were addressed. In Proportion as they become Sayings of Course indeed, and lose their Meaning, they may lose their Mischief. But if others of the same Sort are coined from Time to Time to succeed them, this renews and perpetuates the Mischief ; besides the further Inconveniences of making a Language absurd, and imprinting a Character of Slavishness upon it, under a groundless Pretence of refining and polishing it. For none of these Flights were admitted amongst the best-bred People of the ancient World, till they had lost their good Taste, as well as their Virtue.

And

And as for the other Phrases, of which Custom hath changed or annihilated the Signification, though, after this is done, they are no longer Lies, yet they were Lies all the while it was doing : and every new Sep, taken in the same Road, will be a new Lie, till every Body finds it out, and learns the fashionable Interpretation of it. And, as these Innovations cannot be soon received universally, they embarrass and intangle timorous Minds very grievously, and tempt the irresolute to do what they apprehend is not lawful : while, at the same Time, they give those, who are not so scrupulous as they should be, dangerous Encouragement to become less so than they were. For such, perceiving themselves authorized by general Practice, or perhaps being directed by particular Orders, to say in some Cases Things that look extremely like Falsehoods, will easily go on to venture upon the most real Falsehoods in any Case, when they have Occasion for them. These Liberties therefore should be as sparingly used, and, when they must be used, as carefully explained to all who are concerned in them, as possible : and a very serious Attention shewn to prevent what a great and excellent

excellent Man calls, *our Language running into a Lie*^a.

3. As to all Figures of Speech, Fables, Allegories, feigned Histories, and Parables, those for Instance of our blessed Saviour, and others in Scripture, intended only to convey Instruction more agreeably or efficaciously, there is evidently no Room to condemn these, as Deceits. And whenever Things are either said or written in such a Manner, that the Intention is visibly different from what the Words would else import, this can never be a Breach of Truth, and may sometimes be a very proper and engaging Way of recommending it. But the Case is widely different, when Persons, with all the Marks of Seriousness, affirm what they will afterwards despise and ridicule others for believing. These are plainly designed Falsehoods : and in a greater Degree, or a less, injurious ones. When they do no worse, they put Mens Understandings, and Tempers too, on a severe Trial, without the least Right or Need : and, which determines the Nature of them very clearly, if the Hearer doth not expose himself, the Speaker is dis-

^a Abp. Tillotson.

appointed. Surely this is *foolish Talking, and Jestings not convenient*^b. Nor however little Hurt it may sometimes do, is the Sentence at all too severe in general, which the wise King hath passed upon it: *As a Madman, who casteth Firebrands, Arrows, and Death; so is the Man, who deceiveth his Neighbour, and sayeth, Am I not in Sport*^c?

4. Concerning ambiguous Phrases, which in one Acceptation express our Meaning truly, but in another do not; it must be observed, that when we are bound, by Promise or otherwise, to declare what we know or believe in any Case, we are bound to declare it in such Terms, as are likely to be well understood: else we fail of what we profess, or ought to do. And, even when we are not thus bound, we should speak of Things, if we can safely, with Plainness and Simplicity. For not only this adds greatly to the Agreeableness and Instructiveness of Conversation; but, which brings it under the present Subject, dark and doubtful Sayings often deceive People to their Detriment, and are too often designed to produce that Effect. Yet still there may be Reason for Reservedness towards some

^b Eph. v. 4.

^c Prov. xxvi. 18, 19.

Persons, even in Trifles. For they, who take the Liberty of asking any Questions, that may serve their Turn, will commonly discover almost as much from the Silence of one, who is usually communicative to them, as from his speaking. And whenever, after all our Precaution, Silence will not conceal a Thing, which ought to be concealed, it must be allowable to speak upon the Subject in such a Manner, as to leave that Part of it involved in Obscurity, which is not fit to be revealed. Nay, though we foresee it to be probable, that any one, provided he hath no Title to Information from us, will take our Words in a Sense, in which we do not use them ; yet if that, in which we do use them, be a fair and natural one, and Nothing but his own Rashness leads him into Error ; though, as I said before, Charity bids us hinder it, if we conveniently can, yet Veracity requires it not. For when we design only to keep him ignorant of a Fact, it is his own Fault, if he will also believe a Fancy. But if we go further and lay Snares for him ; if we give Assurances, which, in their obvious and universal Acceptation, are false, but only have a latent forced Construction, in which, after all, they just may be

true : this is Equivocation ; and cannot be defended, unless the grossest Violations of Sincerity can be defended too. For the Intent of using Language to deceive is equally evident in both : and the Contrivance of couching the Deceit in Phrases liable to no Suspicion, adds to the Crime greater Deliberation, and consequently more heinous Guilt.

We are now therefore led to consider,

II. The Pleas, which are urged to justify some Sorts of direct Lying.

For more than a few speculative, and some pious Men, have imagined, that this Practice in certain Cases may do much Good; and can do no Hurt : and then is both allowable and commendable. Speech, they say, was given to Mankind solely for their common Benefit : nor consequently is it ever used amiss, when it contributes to that End. And this Opinion they endeavour to confirm by several Instances of Falsehoods, which good Persons are recorded in Scripture to have uttered knowingly. But, besides that some Instances, which they produce, are not Falsehoods, or were directed by an express Authority, which can supersede ordinary Obligations : good Persons may too possibly both say and do what they

ought not, through Ignorance of their Duty, or Infirmary; and their Commission of known and great Sins is not always related with Censure, it being unnecessary: to which it must be added, that some of their Actions may be praised in holy Writ on the Whole, without the least Intention of approving the Circumstances of Insincerity, or other Imperfections, with which they were accompanied.

Another Argument in Favour of their Notion they draw, somewhat surprisingly, from the Apostle's Words: *putting away Lying, speak every Man Truth with his Neighbour: for we are Members one of another*^d. The Precept, they say, must not be extended further, than the Reason of it extends: which being only, that because of our mutual Relation, we ought to consult our mutual Advantage; where adhering to Truth will not promote this, Falseness may be justly substituted. But, though mutual Advantage is a very strong Tie upon us to speak Truth, St. Paul hath not told us here, that it is the only one. And we experience ourselves to be under another more immediate. We feel a natural Reluctance in our Consciences to lying

^d Eph. iv. 25.

and deceiving, as such, without looking forward to Consequences: and even they who have persuaded themselves that doing it is, in some Instances, lawful, cannot do it however, without an inward Sense of Shame and Guilt. Now it deserves to be well considered, whether transgressing, in order to attain some supposed End of general Utility, this Dictate of our moral Nature, the Principle of which God hath planteth there, be any more allowable, than transgressing the Dictates of Justice or any other moral Obligation, with the same View: whether, in short, it be not, what the Apostle himself mentions with Abhorrence, and that in the very Case of a Lie, *Doing Evil, that Good may come* ^c.

Or, though still any one should think, that our native Antipathy to speaking Falsehood, no more proves it to be always forbidden, than our Unwillingness to give others Pain, which notwithstanding we may and must give them sometimes, for the Sake of a Benefit more considerable: yet it must be observed, that the Scripture both allows and requires Pain and even Death to be inflicted in some Cases: but uniformly forbids Lying,

^c Rom. iii. 7, 8.

without intimating in any one Precept or Declaration concerning it, the Possibility of an Exception. But were the Consideration of Scripture to be set aside, which it never ought; still on the Footing of mere Reason and Experience, a most important Question would remain, what those Instances are, in which, on balancing the two Sides of the Account, Violation of Truth is more beneficial than detrimental to Mankind. For supposing any such can be found, it must be violated in them only. But if none such can be found, or if the Advantage be at all doubtful, or not exceeding great, or attainable any other Way, in the same or but nearly the same Degree: the plain and the safe Rule evidently is, that of *Simplicity and godly Sincerity*^f in all Cases.

The Case indeed of an Attack upon our own or our Neighbours Property, or Life, may seem a very favourable one to the Opinion, which we are now examining. For here it is argued, that assuredly no one hath a Right to rob or to murder; nor consequently suffers any Wrong, when he is prevented from doing either. And if telling him a Falsehood be the likeliest Method of Prevention: hath he

^f 2 Cor. i. 12.

not forfeited all Claim to our telling him Truth ? And is it not much better in every View, that he should be deceived, than accomplish his wicked Purposes ? Why, undoubtedly it seems very hard, especially upon the Party endangered, to say otherwise. Yet this may and ought to be said, that on the one Hand, all the little Good, which a Lie, that will scarce be credited, hath any Chance for doing, may commonly with Prudence be done without it, either by avoiding to answer, or by general and undetermined Answers, which are very different Things from Untruths : and that on the other Hand, instead of Good, a Lie may do much Harm : as the vile Wretches who attempt to commit such Crimes, when they have once or twice found themselves, or others like them, imposed upon, may be provoked by it to grow much more suspicious and barbarous, than they would have been else, Therefore it may be doubted whether, in the Main, Transgression of Truth, even in these Circumstances, prevents or produces Mischief. Surely then he, who refuses to transgress it, acts a worthier Part : and, if he suffers any Thing on that Account, he suf-

fers it *for the Sake of a good Conscience towards God^s.*

Another Case is that of Enemies in War : whom having a Right to kill, it is said, we cannot but have a Right to deceive, that being the smaller Hurt of the two. And yet, not only such Deceivers are treated with peculiar Severity in War, as worse than common Enemies ; but Faith must be preserved, even in the Midst of Arms : else a State of Hostility would be yet more calamitous than it is, and besides would be endless too. For Overtures of Truce or Peace could have no Effect, if no Confidence remained between the contending Parties. Add to this, that if one Side may deceive, the other may : and so neither is in a better Condition, than if both abstained from it : and indeed the Attempt of it by both, will for the most Part be ineffectual ^h.

A third Case, in which many plead for the Lawfulness of making free with Truth, is in dealing with those, who have either lost

^a 1 Pet. ii. 19. iii. 21.

^b *Polyb.* l. xiii. p. 671. condemns Deceit in Princes and Generals, even against Enemies : which he saith the *Achaians* used not, and the *Romans* not much. He adds, p. 673. that Truth always gets the better of Falsehood sooner or later.

in a great Measure the Use of their Understandings, or are not yet sufficiently arrived to it. For it is argued, that these have no Title to conduct themselves, because they have no Ability of doing it : and since the only Service, that Truth can do them, is conducting them properly ; and instead of that, it will often only discompose them, and make them refractory : if employing Falsehood will lead them on quietly in the right Way, it can be no Injury, and may be a great Advantage to them. But consider ; Persons naturally weak, or, through Infirmities, decayed, in their Intellects, may be managed, with a little Skill and Care, intirely to their Satisfaction, or however may soon be pacified again, by Methods very consistent with Sincerity. And they, whose Disorder is a Species of Madness, are not only for the most Part incredibly jealous, but more sagacious too, than is often imagined : And to what Degrees, both of Rage and Violence, Deceits, attempted upon them and detected, will drive them, can scarce be credited. Whereas plain Dealing, if proper Authority be mildly assumed along with it, will generally soon subdue them once for all ; most of them submitting readily to it from a secret

Consciousness of their own State. Then as to Children : it is true, they are easily cheated, and so for a while easily quieted. But what follows? That they quickly come to see through these Artifices, and then are much more intractable than before, and quite outrageous on the very Apprehension of your repeating them. Your Credit with them is lost, the next Time you want to use it for their Good : and their sole Aim for the future is to deceive the Deceiver, gratify their own Inclinations, and carry their own Ends. Now treating them with Fairness and Steadiness, telling them only so much as was proper, but Nothing that they should ever find to be otherwise than they were told, would have totally different Effects : would teach them betimes to hear Reason and yield to it ; would prevent their agitating themselves with perpetual Fits of Passion, by shewing them clearly, what they were to expect, what they were to consider as unfit ; and, which is a much greater Benefit still, would habituate them from the first to Integrity and Honesty in their own Behaviour ; whereas perhaps one of their chief Inducements to that vile Trick of Lying ; of which most of them get something, and too

many so much, that they never leave it; is what really makes their Condition a pitiable one: that they learn it originally from its being used towards themselves by those, who afterwards reprove and punish them for it.

The last Case, which I shall mention, is that of sick Persons: concerning whom it is alledged, that common good Nature directs us to conceal from them sometimes, be it ever so much at the Expence of Truth, the real Name of their Disease, the Danger of their Situation, the Sort of Medicines given them, and all Facts of all Kinds, which, if known, might deject or disturb them: for that not only such Deceit is useful, but they upon whom it is practised, will, when recovered, approve it, and be thankful for it; nay, perhaps have already approved it, and set the Example of it on former like Occasions, and therefore have in Effect consented to it now. But, plausible as this Plea may appear, the Need and the Benefit of employing Falsehood, even in these Circumstances, for the most Part at least, *cometh of Evil*¹. It is because People will not in the Time of their Health become virtuous and reasonable, pious and

¹ Matth. v. 37.

resigned,

resigned, that they want the wretched Support of Untruths in the Time of Sicknefs. And if they, who are about them, scruple to support them thus, as they well may, then they are void of all Consolation. But even supposing the Lies, which they wish for, are told them; they will seldom be told so, as neither to be found out, nor suspected: and Suspicions will often disturb sick Persons more fatally, than knowing the worst would. Or, let Prevarications of this Kind work ever so happy Effects on some particular Occasions, yet there follows a most dreadful general Inconvenience from them: that because some must needs be told their Condition is hopeful and safe, though it be not; others are told in vain, that theirs is so, though it be; for their Friends, they think, will affirm any Thing, to please them. And thus, no more may recover by being deceived, than may be lost by the Impossibility, arising from hence, of knowing that they are not deceived. Their Lives may depend on the Composedness of their Spirits: their Spirits would have been composed, if they could have believed those who attend them: but being sensible what Liberties they will take in these Matters, they

cannot

cannot believe them ; and therefore can have no Relief or Comfort from their Affurances.

However, it must be owned, that in most or all of the abovementioned Cases, there are sometimes Difficulties, with which we have much more Cause to pray God we may never be tried, than to be confident that we shall judge and act rightly, if we are. And therefore, though adhering strictly to Truth, as the Rule, which our Maker hath given us, and trusting Him with the Consequences, evidently appears to be the securest Way : yet, if any one ventures to deviate from it with a visibly good Intention, we should not, I think, pronounce a severe Sentence upon him, considering how prone the best of us is to err in plainer Things ; always provided, that the Liberties, which he takes, be few and modest, and almost extorted from him ; and conscientiously restrained to Things in themselves the least exceptionable. But if Persons, because something may be colourably said for making a little free with Truth on very uncommon Occasions, where no one seems injured by it, will indulge themselves in whatever Falsities they

they please on almost any Occasion ; if, because it hath been apprehended, that Malefactors, and those with whom we are at War, have no Right to Veracity ; and that such, as are incapable of judging at all for themselves, may be deceived for their Advantage by others ; if, I say, upon this, they will imagine they are allowed to treat one Part of Mankind as Villains and Enemies, with whom no Faith is to be kept, and another as Children and Fools, upon whom they may freely impose any Way : this must proceed from a bad Heart ; and the Tendency of it is, to dissolve intirely the Bonds of human Society, and open a high Road to all possible Wickedness and universal Confusion. The Arguments, were they ever so specious, for the Lawfulness of Fraud in seemingly harmless Cases, can never prove it lawful in others of a Nature quite contrary. But, I beg it may be observed, the extreme Danger, which there is notwithstanding, of Mens proceeding in Falsehood to very pernicious Lengths, if once they begin, is a most unanswerable Objection against its being permitted in any Degree at all.

A Consideration so interesting must be urged more at large : and shall, God willing, the next Opportunity. But I hope you have already seen very great Reason to follow the Son of *Sirach's* wife Counsel. *Use not to make any Manner of Lie : for the Custom thereof is not good*^k.

^k Eccles vii. 13.

S E R M O N VIII.

PROV. xii. 22.

Lying Lips are Abomination to the Lord: but they, that deal truly, are his Delight.

AS the Advantages, derived to Mankind from the superior Power, which we enjoy, of communicating our Thoughts one to another, are very great; so the Perversion of it to wrong Uses is very pernicious. And no Perversion of it can be so complete, as when we employ it, instead of informing others, to deceive them. Now, of the more Importance it is, that we should not be guilty of this Crime, the more necessary it must be, that we should know, wherein it consists, and how insufficient the Pleas are, which in some Circumstances have been made in its Favour.

There-

Therefore I began to discourse on the Subject of our Obligation to Truth, by shewing,

I. What Things are, and are not, Breaches of it.

II. What Breaches are unwarrantably by some Persons thought justifiable.

And under this latter Head, I first proved, that Scripture enjoins Veracity, without authorizing any Exceptions, and that indeed it is, in its own Nature, a Duty, independently of Consequences : then I confuted or counter-balanced the good Effects ascribed to the Violation of it in several particular Cases : and lastly, intimated the general Danger, to which they who depart from it, expose themselves, and tempt others, of running on from one Liberty to another, till at Length they venture to say, and afterwards to do, any Thing, which they imagine will contribute to a good End : a Practice productive of such dreadful Evils, that I must enlarge upon it somewhat further.

Things, which every one allows to be good, no one needs to be cheated into. And where Opinions differ, neither God nor Man hath given us a Right to bring over others into
our

our own by Falsehood: and on what Foundation then can we take such a Step? I may think perhaps, that this or that Thing would be for the Benefit of the World, or of such a Part of it, or Individual in it. But this no more empowers me to use Fraud, than to use Force, for accomplishing it. Another Person may think, at the same Time, a different or a contrary Thing beneficial: and may have as high an Esteem of his own Judgement, as I have of mine. If then I may employ Deceit to serve my Purpose, why not he to serve his? Now what can this end in, but the Ruin of all Integrity, and all Confidence, amongst Men? And what Good can there be in View, that bears any Proportion to such a Calamity?

But some argue: Our Opposers will certainly use Falsehood for their bad Ends: if therefore we do not use it for our good ones, they have a plain Advantage over us; and we shall be undone, for Want of turning their own Weapons against them. Now if this were the Case; it would only be the Case of suffering for Truth, which is suffering for God: and hereafter, at least, no one will be a Loser by that. But indeed, at present, upon the Whole,

the contrary is the Case. If your Opposers have Recourse to unfair Arts, detect those Arts in them, and abstain from them yourselves : and, whatever Difficulties you may be under for a Time, in the Conclusion all will come out well. *A lying Tongue is but for a Moment : but the Lip of Truth shall be established for ever* *. Uprightness, with only common Prudence, will not fail to get the better at Length : and the Reason, why we experience it no oftener, is indeed that we try it so seldom. In the Midst of our Complaints, we do the very Things, of which we complain. This is no Combat of fair Dealing against unfair, but of Craft against Craft : and perhaps our own Artifices contribute more, than those of our Adversaries, towards the Loss of our Cause. For the surest Way of missing our Aim is to sink in our Credit. Therefore let the End, that we propose, be ever so good, it is neither right nor wise to use Falsehoods for attaining it.

But, in Fact, the Ends proposed to be served by this Method, fall usually very far short of being near so good, as they are pretended to be. Some blameable Gratification,

* Prov. xii. 19.

some worldly Interest, some party Point, the Promotion of some bad or doubtful Cause, is the Thing, which People, on such Occasions, have at Heart, however studiously they disguise their Aims to others, and, if possible, to themselves. These are the Purposes, for which Truth is to be depressed, Imposture countenanced; some considered as too weak, others as too wicked, to be treated with common Honesty. And thus every one, who can but think hardly enough of those, from whom he differs, sets himself at Liberty to speak to them, or of them, as insincerely as ever he will. And if he may venture upon false Assertions; he will be apt to think, why not upon false Oaths? And, if for the Service of the Public or his Friends, why not for his own? How shocking a State of Things would this introduce! Hear the Prophet's Description of it: *They bend their Tongues, like their Bow, for Lies; but they are not valiant for the Truth upon the Earth: for they proceed from Evil to Evil, and they know not me, saith the Lord. Take ye Heed every one of his Neighbour; and trust ye not in any Brother: for every Brother will utterly supplant, and every Neighbour will walk with Slanders. And they will deceive*

every one his Neighbour, and will not speak the Truth: they have taught their Tongue to speak Lies, they weary themselves to commit Iniquity. Thine Habitation is in the Midst of Deceit: through Deceit they refuse to know me, saith the Lord^b.

Nay further yet, if Persons may falsify and perjure, where shall they stop? It will be said, why not purloin, why not rob, why not murder, to serve a good Purpose, that is, a convenient one, for others, or themselves? Each Liberty taken leads on, by a plain high Road, to a greater: and observe, I intreat you, what a Figure they make together in the Word of God. *By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing Adultery, they break out, and Blood toucheth Blood. Therefore shall the Land mourn, and every one that dwelleth therein shall languish^c.*

But could we restrain the Advocates for Falsehood, and their Disciples, to this Offence only, and even to the seemingly more innocent Sorts of it: yet real Religion, real Virtue, the real Happiness of Mankind, I believe have never on the Whole been served by such Arts: and seldom, if ever, hath it been designed

^b Jer. ix. 3—6.

^c Hof. iv. 2, 3.

that they should. Superstition indeed, and Enthusiasm, have been greatly promoted by them: and Infidelity not a little. For the Lies framed in Favour of Religion have strangely discredited the Truths urged in Favour of it. And besides, as some have thought it useful, and therefore allowable, to affirm whatever would conduce to the Propagation of orthodox Belief: others, on the same Principle, have thought it as allowable to do the same Thing for the Propagation of Unbelief. And, as the former have counted Nothing too bad to be reported of those, whom they deemed the Enemies of the Faith: so the latter have thought scarce any Thing, either too opprobrious to be said, or too improbable to be swallowed, in Relation to the Teachers and Advocates of it. One Side exclaims against religious, the other against irreligious, Frauds; and so far as either are committed, both are in the Right: but both lamentably overlook the obvious Rule; that neither should impute them unjustly, and neither be guilty of them at all. The Mischiefs of the Falsehoods invented to decry Revelation are as plain, as, (what surely admits no Doubt) its Importance to the outward Tranquility, the inward Peace,

the present, the future Welfare of Men. And the Sinfulness of Falsehoods to support it, cannot be more strongly expressed, than in the Words of *Job*: *Hear now my Reasonings, and hearken to the Pleadings of my Lips. Will ye speak wickedly for God, and talk deceitfully for him?—Is it good, that He should search you out? or as one Man mocketh another, do ye so mock him?—Shall not his Excellency make you afraid, and his Dread fall upon you* ^d?

Thus far I have spoken concerning the Lies, which to some have seemed lawful. And now I proceed to speak

III. Of such, as too many are apt to account excusable.

They own them to be in Strictness faulty: but extenuate the Fault in their Imagination, till it comes to appear little or nothing; and then venture upon them as freely, as if they were expressly permitted.

Thus, for Instance, when Persons have done amiss, and want to conceal it, if deviating a little from Truth will have that Effect, and keep all quiet; they fancy it is a tolerably harmless Method of preventing, at a cheap Rate, a good deal of Anger or Contempt in

^d Job xiii. 6, 7, 9, 11.

others, and Shame, if not further Inconveniences, to themselves : But surely they ought to consider, that having committed one blameable Action, which perhaps is but a Folly, can never give them a Privilege of committing a second, which is a Sin. Besides, very few wrong Things are done, but some Body hath a Right to inquire into them, and be made acquainted with them. Now denying them to such, is plainly injurious to them : and according to the Nature of the Case, may be highly prejudicial. Nay, Persons who have no Title to any Information, are intitled however not to be misled by false Information : which often may do them Disservice in many Ways. Further, the Hope of hiding Faults thus, encourages the Commission of them beyond all Things : till there is hardly any Wickedness, that some poor Wretches will not venture upon ; because they imagine there is hardly any from which they cannot clear themselves pretty well, in the Opinion of others, by a few round Assertions or Denials, that seem to cost them little. But indeed Nothing in the World costs them so dear, as this vile Practice : for it continually accumulates fresh

with whatever Accusations we can hope to get believed, and sometimes more. Not only what we have no sufficient Cause to think true, but what we have abundant Cause to think false, we are tempted to say of them at such Times ; and fancy it is almost a Justification of us, if we can plead, that we did not begin. Yet perhaps we did, if the Case were fairly stated. But supposing the contrary : Is there any Pretence for our turning Liars and Slanderers, because others are inconsiderately, or even designedly injurious? May not we thus easily become as bad or worse than they? Is it not the sure Method of exasperating, and perpetuating, Enmity? And why should we not rather acquire the Approbation of God and of our own Hearts, the Esteem of the World and of our Adversaries themselves, by treating their Reputations with generous Tenderneſs?

But be it ever so wrong to speak ill of others falsely, yet speaking a little too well of any one, we may imagine, can never be much blamed ; an Act of so much Good-nature may seem almost a meritorious Transgression. But, in Reality, besides that doing this by no Means proceeds always from Benevolence, but too commonly

monly from interested Views, or even malicious Purposes; let it proceed from what it will, it often produces most lamentable bad Effects. By raising Persons Characters, or magnifying their Circumstances beyond Truth, you may induce others to enter into Engagements with them, or to repose Confidences in them, that may prove very fatal; you may occasion their being employed in Affairs of Importance, to which they are unequal; whence dreadful Mischiefs have come: you may, by exalting them, be the Means of disappointing, depressing, ruining their much worthier Rivals: And you contribute to annihilate that Distinction between one Man and another, which public Welfare, no less than private Justice, requires to be kept up. Therefore, though, doubtless, we ought to be chiefly cautious what Harm we say of our Neighbours; yet, in some Cases especially, we ought to be very cautious too, what Good we say of them, though still we should charitably hope and believe as much, as with any Reason we can.

And as designedly giving People a better Character to others than they merit, is not excusable: so neither is extolling to themselves their Virtues or Accomplishments beyond the due

due Bounds, be it by gross Flattery, or by refined; though Pleas are urged for it, both as demanded by the Rules of Civility, (whereas indeed these Rules are very consistent with those of Sincerity) and as the Way to make them become what they are told they are. Now, on the contrary, this is the Way to make them think they need neither to amend nor improve; to fill their Hearts with Vanity, and their Behaviour with Insolence; to encourage them in their favourite Follies and Vices; and thus lead them into Disesteem and Wretchedness. The Commendation which Persons deserve should very seldom be given them fully to their Faces: but giving them more, and persuading them they are already in rightful Possession of that high Character, which they should only be taught to aim at, and at most to hope for in due Time, generally proceeds from weak Fondness or interested Baseness; and rarely intends, and scarce ever doth them any Good.

Another Case, in which the Speaking of Untruths is considered in a Light much too favourable by the Parties, who fancy they find their Account in it, is that of Trade. For they alledge, that though, undoubtedly, it is very unhappy and very wrong; yet, in Fact, False-

hood hath prevailed in this Part of human Affairs to such a Degree, that Veracity cannot support itself: they must do as others do, or they must be ruined. Now indeed there is no Question, but wicked People have thrown many Difficulties in the Way of such, as else would be honest. And *Woe unto them, by whom the Offence*, for it is a dangerous one, *cometh*^c: who, making Advantages of Fraud, bring Disadvantages on Uprightness. But still the Necessity of Prevarication in order to thrive is merely a Pretence, of bad Persons originally, by which others have too easily suffered themselves to be deceived, and so adopted it. A *lying Tongue* may carry some Points: but will not *the Lip of Truth* gain Ground of it upon the Whole? Is it Nothing, or is it not the greatest of all Things, that we must love to deal with them, in whom we find that we can place Confidence? It is both safer and easier. And thus, though they may have Inconveniences to struggle through at first; yet, when once they have established a Character, the Benefits of it will be certain and durable. Doubtless many a fair Trader hath failed: but then some accidental great Loss, or Want of Skill, or of Prudence,

^c Matth. xviii. 7.

or Diligence, or obliging Behaviour, hath been the Cause; and seldom, if ever, his Integrity. The Reputation of that, which cannot be secured without the Reality, gives Men great Pre-eminence above their Equals, nay, above their Superiors, in other Respects. — But even were ~~adhering~~ to Truth disadvantageous upon the Balance of worldly Considerations, yet surely it is far better to bear this Inconvenience patiently, and make ourselves Amends for it by greater Industry and Frugality, than to infringe a plain Duty, and offend our Maker. Let Falsehoods be ever so common and successful in all Business, and perhaps peculiarly in some: this alters not our Obligation. It may moderate our Censures of others: but it cannot give a Latitude to us in our own Behaviour. *That which is altogether just shalt thou follow*, saith the Scripture^f: and *Thou shalt not follow a Multitude to do Evil*^g. Nay, to put one of the hardest Cases, if any Person, in selling me any Thing, hath imposed upon me ever so much by Falsehood: that doth not give me the least Right to impose on another, even in the very same Affair. I have been deceived: but this no more authorizes me to deceive the next Person I deal with,

^f Deut. xvi. 20.^g Exod. xxiii. 2.

than having been robbed authorizes me to assault and plunder the next Man I meet. The Frequency of Frauds, and the Temptations that arise from thence, are very strong Reasons for adding great Prudence to our Innocence ; for being much on our Guard, in what Professions we engage or continue, with whom we have Transactions, to what Employments we put out those, who are under our Care : but they are no Manner of Reason, why we should look on the Dealings of Man with Man only as a fair Trial of unfair Skill, and contribute to make the World worse, because it is so bad already.

One Observation further I would make under this Head, that, of the more Importance the Preservation of Sincerity in Business is, the more we ought to avoid inticing and almost forcing those, with whom we have commercial Concerns, into Insincerity, in order to satisfy and please us : we should allow them to make, and to own they make, reasonable Profits ; we should yield to Truth, when we have Cause to think we hear it ; and encourage it by favourable Treatment, where-ever we see it.

Another Occasion, mentioned already, and deserving it again, on which too many reckon

Lies excusable, is, when they are told to entertain the Company. The End being so innocent, and laudable, a small Irregularity in the Means, they hope, may surely be overlooked. But this Entertainment is commonly given at the Expence of more Persons than one. It seldom fails, but somebody or other is misrepresented to his Detriment or Discredit. He is certainly injured. They who are misled to a wrong Judgement about him, nay about any Thing, may be injured by it not a little. The facetious Person himself, who takes these Liberties in Conversation, whatever Applause he may gain from the inconsiderate, must never expect any serious Esteem, even from them : and, indeed, by trespassing against Truth on so slight an Inducement as a Jest, will bring himself into a Temptation, as well as a Suspicion, of making still freer with it, whenever that may serve a Purpose of greater Moment to him. The Affectation therefore of being witty by spreading Falsehoods is by no Means an allowable Vanity. Nor indeed can any Way of raising our own Reputation be at all defended, that is inconsistent with Veracity.

Some appear to think it very pardonable, provided they say no Harm of others, to say

as much Good 'as they please of themselves, true or false. For whom, they argue, doth that hurt? Why, if you are not believed, it will hurt you that say it, very much. And if you are, it may hurt those who hear it, or hear of it, still more. No one hath a Right to put off himself, any more than another, for more than his Value : and he who attempts it knowingly, commits, as far as in him lies, a very base, and often very mischievous, Fraud. Probably indeed the World will detect him : but that proves only his Folly, not his Innocence.

Some again contrive a different, and astonishing Method of imposing on Mankind in this Respect. They take a Pride in saying, not good, but bad Things of themselves, that are not true : profess vile Opinions, which inwardly they do not believe ; and pretend to have done profligate Actions, for which they have not had the Heart or the Opportunity. For who can forbid them, they imagine, to treat their own Characters as freely as they please ? And indeed, if it was really their View to become, by these Means, Objects of public Scorn and Abhorrence, they have fairly earned it, and one would wish them Success. But their seeming unaccountable Self-denial is rank Ambition.

They want to gain Credit to Wickedness and themselves at the same Time : by representing their own Lives and Principles, as worse than they are, to make those of their Disciples worse than they would be ; and to place themselves at the Head of this chosen Band. An Employment so diabolical in its Plan, and so execrable in its Effects, that every good and every wise Person is bound to express the extreme Detestation of it, which he cannot but feel.

These, I think, are the chief Cases, in which one Sort or another of Persons are apt to reckon Falsehood excusable. And if it be, on the contrary, so bad in the best of them, there is no Need of shewing particularly, how abominable it must be, when deliberately employed in private or party Contests, in supplanting and undermining, in prosecuting Schemes of unwarrantable Gain, in the Service of Revenge, Malice or Envy, in the Gratification of idle Talkativeness, or of a Desire to seem knowing and important. In all these Ways, and many more, Liars are doing such dreadful Mischief, and so continually, that were no other Guilt imputable to the *Tongue*, well might St. James accuse it of *setting on Fire the Course*

Course of Nature, and being set on Fire of Hell^b.

But in order to apprehend rightly the full Extent of this Sin, it must be carefully observed, that not only if we affirm any Thing which we think to be false, but if we affirm it without Cause to think it true, we are still Deceivers : or though we have Cause to think it true, yet if we affirm it more positively, than we have Cause ; declaring ourselves to know certainly what we only believe, or to believe firmly what we only suspect and guess, the Case is but little mended : that not only gross Falsities, but more refined ones, artful Quibbles and mental Evasions, dark Intimations and Hints, not asserting, but insinuating to others, what at least we doubt within ourselves, all come under the same Condemnation : nay, that sometimes an affected Silence, and at others Truth itself, told imperfectly and insidiously, may deeply partake of the Guilt of a Lie. And lastly, it must be remembered, that, besides the Falsehood of asserting what we do not believe, or doing Things equivalent, there is another Sort, often full as bad, of promising what we do not intend, or do not afterwards take Care to per-

^b James iii. 6.

form : and that every lesser Degree of Expectation given, if it be insincerely given, or the fulfilling of it neglected, is an Approach to the same Sin.

From all these Transgressions then let us conscientiously preserve ourselves : and for that End, avoid the ordinary Occasions of them ; compose our Resentments, moderate our Pursuits, mortify our Vanity, check our Fears, think before we speak, and keep Silence rather than speak amiss : For, *in the Multitude of Words, there wanteth not Sin : but he that refraineth his Lips, is wise*ⁱ. For the same End let us frequently reflect, that the Comfort and Agreeableness of Conversation, the Continuance of Harmony and Friendship amongst Relations and Acquaintance, amongst all indeed, who have Concerns with one another, the regular and prosperous Management of Business, in short, the Tranquillity and good Order of human Society, depends on speaking Truth : For the Harm, that can be done, without departing from it, is comparatively insignificant. And therefore a Liar, till he is found out, is the most mischievous of Creatures : and, after he is found out, as he never

ⁱ Prov. x. 19.

fails to be, sooner or later, the most hated or the most despised.

Let us consider also, that Sincerity is a Duty no less plain than important : that our Consciences require it of us, and reproach us for every Breach of it : that the Light of Nature taught it the very Heathens, though imperfectly, as it did every Thing else ; and that Scripture abounds with the strictest Precepts of it, and strongest Motives to it. There we learn, that *the Devil is a Liar*, and by Means of lying *was a Murderer, from the Beginning*; involved our whole Race in Sin and Misery by one Falsehood, and practises the same Arts upon as many, as he can, to this Day. Thus is he *the Father of Liars* : and, if we are such, *we are of our Father the Devil, and the Lusts of our Father we do*^k. But the distinguished Character of God is, that he *cannot lie*^l : and we ought to be *holy, as he is holy*^m. The blessed Jesus too is *the faithful and true Witness*ⁿ, *who did no Sin, neither was Guile found in his Mouth*^o; who for this Cause came into the World, that he should bear Witness to the Truth^p,

^k John viii. 44.

ⁿ Rev. iii. 14.

^l Tit. i. 2.

^o 1 Pet. ii. 22.

^m 1 Pet. i. 15, 16.

^p John xviii. 37.

and laid down his Life to *redeem us from all Iniquity*^a. Therefore since *Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us*, let us keep the Feast, not with the Leaven of Malice and Wickedness, but with the unleavened Bread of Truth and Sincerity^b; and speaking the Truth in Love, grow up into him in all Things, which is the Head, even Christ^c. Again, the Spirit of Grace^d is the Spirit of Truth also, whose Office is to guide us into all Truth^e. Faith and Truth are amongst his Fruits^f in those who are regenerated by him. And the Wisdom, which is from above, is without Hypocrisy^g. Lie not therefore one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old Man with his Deeds; and have put on the new Man, which is renewed in Knowledge, after the Image of him that created him^h. Nor doth this appear, in the Word of God, to be more our Duty, than our Interest in Respect of both Worlds. For in the present, what Man is he, that lusteth to live, and would fain see good Days? Keep thy Tongue from Evil; and thy Lips, that they speak no Guileⁱ. And as to the

^a Tit. ii. 14.^b 1 Cor. v. 7, 8.^c Eph. iv. 15.^d Heb. x. 29.^e John xvi. 13.^f Gal. v. 22. Eph. v. 9.^g James iii. 17.^h Col. iii. 9, 10.ⁱ Ps. xxxiv. 12, 13.

next, *If any Man seem to be religious, and bridletb not his Tongue, this Man's Religion is vain^a. All Liars shall have their Part in the Lake, which burneth with Fire and Brimstone^b. And there shall in no wise enter into the new Jerusalem any Thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh Abomination, or maketh a Lie^c.*

James i. 26.

^b Rev. xxi. 8.

^c v. 27.

S E R M O N IX.

LUKE xxi. 19.

In your Patience possess ye your Souls.

THE unpleasant Things which befall us, in one Part or another of this Life, are so many; and the Impressions, which they make upon us, are commonly so strong; that being affected by them no otherwise, than we ought, constitutes a large and difficult Part of our Duty: which therefore I shall endeavour to explain and recommend to you in several Discourses. And as some Things are immediately and necessarily uneasy to us, and some only by Means of needless and unreasonable Reflections and Comparisons of our own State with what others are, or with what we might have been: I shall speak at present of bearing what we cannot but feel disagreeably, with Composure, which is usually called Patience;

tience ; in the next Place, I shall direct to the like Behaviour under comparative Misfortunes, which is generally expressed by the Name of Contentment ; and after these moral Obligations, which however need not and cannot well be altogether separated from those of Piety, I shall proceed to lay before you more distinctly the religious ones, of Resignation first, and then of Thankfulness, under every Affliction and seeming Disadvantage.

Now the Feelings unavoidably disagreeable to us, and tempting us to Impatience, are chiefly Pain, Sorrow, Fear, and Anger.

1. Pain : under which may be comprehended also Sickness, Restlessness, and languid Lowness. These are often so grievous, by their Degree, or Continuance, or both ; that we cannot fail, from the very Make of our Nature, to suffer under them extremely : and stifling at such Times all Expressions of suffering, and earnest Wishes of Ease, would usually require too violent an Effort to be lasting ; or perhaps to be safe, even could we persist in it. Besides, these external Marks of Distress were certainly designed by Providence to excite a proper Degree of Pity and Assistance from those around us ; which, without some powerful

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ful Calls upon them, would frequently be withheld. And therefore we ought neither to condemn ourselves, nor others, who may possibly undergo far more than we imagine, for some strong Expressions of present Misery : nor think it a very heinous Fault, if they now and then exceed the proper Bounds. But still the more calm and moderate we are, the more we shall appear, if not to need, yet to deserve, both Compassion and Relief ; and they will both be afforded us with more Good-will and Regard. Then further, all vehement Complaints and immoderate Significations of our Wretchedness, heighten strangely our own Sense of it ; and thus either work us up into wild Rage, or sink us down into spiritless Dejection ; and so make our Case much worse than it was ; when, alas, we have Cause to seek out for every Alleviation, great or small.

In acute Torments, it is a very comfortable Circumstance, if we can hope, that they will not be durable. Even a short Time, indeed, will seem dreadfully long to us. But however, it must be a Consolation in a Storm, that we are making towards a safe Harbour within our View, though we seem to approach it slowly. And as the easing of Pain
is

is not only Ease but Delight ; we should support ourselves by expecting it, as well as enjoy it when it comes.

In tedious Disorders it may be very useful to look back now and then, and see how much we have gone through already : not in order to load our Minds with the Burthen of it a second Time ; but to learn, from what we have done already, what we can do more, if Need be. And probably, we shall be able to do it with less Difficulty hereafter, than we did before. For by Degrees and proper Care, both our Minds and Bodies become habituated to endure Hardship quietly and chearfully. It is a great Proof and Instance of the Mercy of our Creator, that we are so framed. And we ought to make a faithful Use of his Goodness in this Respect, as well as others.

But in order to acquiesce more patiently under our Sufferings, we should look beyond the Bitterness to the possible Benefits of them. Our Liableness to them may teach us Caution and Prudence in many Parts of our Conduct, in order to avoid them ; may preserve us from Follies destructive to our Fortunes, our Reputations, our Health itself. For Numbers have presumed so far upon their Strength, as
utterly

utterly to destroy it by Irregularities, while the happy Necessity of being discreet in the Management of themselves hath carried on many who were very infirm, comfortably enough, to a good old Age. Therefore, on the Whole, perhaps bodily Complaints may prove a Security against greater Inconveniences: and, were these less; yet only the Difference between the one Evil and the others ought to be computed, as clear Loss to us. Nor is it only from Follies, that Men are thus kept back, but frequently from Sins also: from some, to which, if they would examine themselves, they might perceive they should have been exposed; and possibly from others, of which they have no Suspicion. Firmness of Constitution, Vehemence of Appetites and Passions, flowing Spirits, Confidence of being able to do and to bear almost any Thing, mislead Men unaccountably in the Conduct of Life: make them forgetful of God and their latter End, prompt them to Debauchery, Intemperance, Violence, Injustice, to regard only present Indulgence, and take the good Things of this World for their Portion. Better were it for such as resist not these Temptations, if they

they had experienced in their Stead the severest Discipline of Pain and Sickness. These remind us of our Dependence on him who made us ; of the Vanity of earthly Enjoyments, of Mortality and its Consequences ; of pitying and lessening the Afflictions of our Fellow-creatures ; of shewing Kindness, as we often need it. And the Exercise of Devotion towards God, and Goodness to those around us, will so pleasingly employ our Thoughts, so effectually sooth our Minds, and reconcile us to ourselves and our Condition, that we shall find the roughest Attacks on our outward Frame very supportable.

I shall only observe further under this Head, that Poverty and Want, when they are so extreme as to bring on actual bodily Sufferings, are to be placed to the Account of Pain : but such Pain very seldom, if ever, arises to near the Height which various Diseases cause ; and is much more constantly cured or mitigated by the Care of charitable Persons. Indigence, therefore, in this View, is very consistent with Patience : and that in the other View, of Reflection and Comparison, it is equally compatible with Contentment, shall be shewn you hereafter.

2. The next Source of Impatience before mentioned is Sorrow : which sometimes is mere Sympathy with the Calamities of others. But this does not commonly rise to the Height of Impatience : much oftener we are impatient with the wretched through our Want of Sympathy. There are those however, who are made so uneasy by the Distresses which they see, that they will not bear the Uneasiness of attending to them enough to give them due Assistance. Now this excessive Tenderness is an unhappy Infirmary. It argues indeed somewhat of a right Disposition : but perverted to a quite different Purpose from what Nature meant. And we should moderate the passive Feeling, in order to exert the requisite active Goodness ; nor would this, on Trial, be found very difficult.

But our Grief is usually for Things happening, which we apprehend to be Evils to ourselves : and they may be of various Sorts. The more considerable are, Unkindness or Loss of Friends, Diminutions of Fortune, Disappointments in worldly Views, Imputations on our Characters, Consciousness of imprudent or sinful Behaviour. All these may be needlessly aggravated by the voluntary Workings
of

of our own Minds ; and so far belong to the Head of Discontent : but much of the Concern, which they give, is unavoidable, and relates to the present Subject.

Unkindness, where we had peculiar Reason to expect the contrary, is one of the bitterest Afflictions of Life. We should labour to prevent it, by chusing the Objects both of our Love and Esteem with great Caution ; and restrain our Affection towards them within due Bounds ; instead of letting it run, or perhaps forcing it, into romantic Extremes, which must end in something wrong ; and we should most attentively endeavour to give no Cause of Dislike and Alienation. When it happens notwithstanding, that our most reasonable Hopes are frustrated ; Change of Opinion concerning the blameable Party must naturally, if we are considerate, produce in us Change of Regard. And we must comfort ourselves, that the Fault is not on our Side ; take Care to continue still equally unrepachable ; apply our Thoughts to the Duties of such other Connections and Ties, as remain upon us after this is weakened or dissolved ; raise our Hearts more to him, who always makes a gracious Return ; and then no Ingratitude or Infidelity,

which

which we can experience on Earth, will be able to overwhelm us.

Concern for the Loss of our Friends by Death, in itself a sore Trial, is aggravated sometimes by a confused Imagination, as if Death were a Misfortune to them : whereas, if they were good and virtuous, it is in Truth the greatest possible Gain. It can therefore be only ourselves, that we bemoan with Justice : and the Damage to us may be very considerable : for which Reason we should be solicitous, both to make all the Improvement by our Friends, and shew all the Kindness to them, that we can, whilst we have them ; lest we should regret our Negligence, when it is too late. But, though the common Fault is under-rating the Value of those, who are near and ought to be dear to us, yet present Grief on losing them may possibly overdo it ; and we may find ourselves able to go on without them far more tolerably, than we imagined. Necessity will put us on exerting our Powers : we shall seek for other Helps and other Comforts ; and, in some Degree at least, we shall find them. Or, supposing the Accident to be as grievous, and as irreparable, as we apprehend

hend it ; yet this Consolation is left, that the painful Feeling of it will greatly diminish, however impossible we may at the Time conceive that to be. Indeed some appear unwilling that this should happen ; and account it a Duty to afflict themselves as much and as long as they can : whilst others go on to do it, though they profess to believe it a great Sin. But, in Reality, moderate Concern, for a moderate Season, is the useful Dictate of Nature : and immoderate Concern is pardonable Weakness ; only it ought not to be wilfully indulged, wrought up to a great Height and lengthened. Even if we affect to do these Things, God has mercifully provided, in the unchangeable Frame of our Nature, that they shall have an End : and we should, instead of absurdly resisting him, co-operate with him by prudent Reflection : not aim at Insensibility ; but only at such a rational Degree of Disengagement, as suits our Condition ; thus preparing by due Behaviour under one Stroke, to bear others which are to be expected. Persons on a Journey quit many Things, one after another, that are very agreeable to them ; regret them all, but go forward however with composed Minds. Now we are Travellers through Life : our Friends are so
too :

too : our appointed Stages are different : and we must learn to part.

Another Cause of Sorrow, Loss of worldly Substance, if it be so great as to bring on absolute painful Want, hath been already considered : and if it doth no more than lower us in Comparison with others, will be considered hereafter. But a few Things may be observed here. We commonly urge it, as a great Aggravation of our Grief, if we not only are destitute of the Conveniences, which wealthier Persons enjoy, but have had them and known them, and been deprived of them. Now surely, on the Whole, our Condition is better for this, than if we had never had them, unless we make it worse by repining. Besides, when we had them, did they make us extremely happy? In all Likelihood far from it. And why then should foregoing them make us extremely miserable? Or how happy soever we were before, why should we not now be as easy as we can? Why indeed should we not provide for such Accidents, by living in the Midst of Plenty, as if we had less of it, and doing Good with the Remainder? This would be the best Use of it, were we ever so sure of keeping the Whole ; but hath a singular Advantage, if we

are to lose Part. For then we shall be able afterwards to afford ourselves, perhaps nearly, if not quite, as much as we did before : the Poor and the Public will be the Sufferers : and our Concern for them will, instead of a selfish, be a virtuous one, and probably seldom excessive.

Disappointments in other worldly Matters, Failure of obtaining Rank, Power, Favour, or Loss of them after they are obtained, require scarce any other Considerations to alleviate them, than Disappointments about Wealth do. Only as it is yet more uncertain, whether they, who seek them, shall be able to acquire them ; or they, who acquire them, to retain them ; and indeed, whether they, who do both, shall be the better or the worse for them ; there is less Reason to set our Hearts upon them, and afflict ourselves at Crosses in Relation to them.

But perhaps our Grief is, that our Character in the World is impaired : and this we cannot tell how to bear. Yet the Case may be, that it had been raised too high ; and now is reduced only to what it should be. Surely we may bear this : it will teach us to know ourselves, keep us from aiming in any Respect at Things above us, and do us Good many Ways. Or if others think too lowly of us, yet provided they impute
Nothing

Nothing bad to us, we may still be very easy. We ourselves are ignorant of the Worth of many: no Wonder, if many be ignorant of ours. But supposing, that even downright Ill is spoken of us; possibly it is because we have deserved just the contrary, because we have done our Duty; and then what saith the Scripture? That we have Cause to be sorry and dejected? No. Suffering for Conscience Sake is the very Case, of which our Saviour saith in the Text, *In your Patience possess ye your Souls*. Elsewhere he saith more. *Blessed are ye, when Men shall revile you—and say all Manner of Evil falsely against you, for my Name's Sake: rejoice and be exceeding glad: for great is your Reward in Heaven* ^a. Nay, he goes further still: *Woe unto you, when all Men shall speak well of you* ^b. Not that a good Reputation is in itself a blameable Thing: but that when *all Men*, particularly bad Men, applaud any one highly, it is a Ground for him to suspect himself of being too much *conformed to this World* ^c. Or, if we are not defamed for having acted wisely and well, yet perhaps it is for something indifferent, that we are misrepresented; and we cannot be fairly accused of acting foolishly or wickedly. In

^a Matth. v. 11, 12.^b Luke vi. 26.^c Rom. xii. 2.

this Case, if we have not Merit, we have Innocence, to support us. And a great Support it is, had we none else. But there will always be some in the World to do us Justice. And, by the Assistance of their Friendship, indeed sooner or later without it, Time will bring Truth to Light.

But possibly we think our Behaviour hath been imprudent ; and we have brought our Sufferings on ourselves ; and this causes our Sorrow. Yet possibly also we may charge ourselves, as Persons under Affliction often do, either unjustly, or however much too heavily. We did as well perhaps, as the Abilities, which God hath given us, permitted : and if so, we are not to blame. But if we were imprudent, let us grow prudent now : not torment ourselves fruitlessly, which would be fresh Folly, but labour composedly to retrieve our false Steps, as far as we can.

But it may be we grieve, not for Indiscretions merely, but for Sins. And this Grief should certainly be the heaviest, which is usually the lightest. Yet, though in most Persons it very much wants to be increased ; in some it needs to be restrained and regulated. Self-Reflection was given us, not barely to make us uneasy,

uneasy, but, by so doing, to amend us. If it rises to a higher Degree, than contributes to our Amendment, it is undergoing so much Misery to no Use. . And if we carry it so far as to obstruct our Amendment, it is adding greatly to our former Guilt. Excess of Concern either for the weak or the wicked Things that we have done, may sink us into Despondency, may drive us to Intemperance, may incite us to yet more desperate Courses. Therefore we should by no Means be impatient with ourselves : (for it is commonly a Mark of Pride : we cannot bear the Imagination of having acted wrong :) but should humbly acknowledge our Faults and Infirmities, beg Wisdom and Strength from God's Holy Spirit for the Sake of his blessed Son; and in the Faith of that Assistance, without which we can do Nothing, meekly and perseveringly labour to do better. By this Method we shall learn Self-Knowledge and Watchfulness ; improve by our very Falls in Skill to stand, recover our Character amongst Men, acquire a lively Hope of Acceptance with God, and be at Peace within.

3. The next Cause of Impatience, mentioned before, was Fear. Now Fear supposes the Evil apprehended to be at some Distance : per-

haps the Distance is so great, that we need not yet provide against it : and why should we disquiet ourselves before the Time ? But admitting the Danger to be nearer: though doubtless this Passion was wisely and kindly implanted in us by our Maker for Precaution, yet we must keep it within Bounds ; else we shall be incapable of using effectual Precaution ; indeed shall contribute to bring on the very Thing we dread. If we preserve our Minds in a Condition to take proper Measures, it may never come near us ; or though it do, may never fall upon us. Future bad Events, as well as good, are extremely uncertain. Our Pleasure is often diminished by the latter Uncertainty. Why should not our Uneasiness be calmed by the former ? Have not we often seen others, have not we often been ourselves, grievously frightened with the Prospect of what after all did not happen ? Let us oppose Terror with Hope. Or, if the Agitation, produced by the Conflict between the two, makes our Case worse, as in some Minds it seems to do ; let us lay aside Hope, and take it for granted that the Misfortune we expect will befall us : yet it may continue a much less Time, than we expect. Or if not, it may however be much
more

more tolerable. Fear is a strange Magnifier. People say, they are positive, they are certain, that they shall never be able to go through what is approaching. They are not certain, they cannot be certain before-hand. Human Nature will endure much more, than we imagine. At least, surely God can strengthen us, if he will. And his Word declares, *God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will, with the Temptation also, make a Way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it* ^d. Most Men have found, and the timorous will own it, that they have frequently suffered a great deal more by the Apprehension of heavy Strokes, than by the Infliction. Why should we not learn then to moderate our Apprehensions? Look steadily at the Thing feared: examine the worst of it: but observe also the Mitigations and Remedies, and apply them. They are various in themselves, and useful in various Degrees, according to the Difference of Circumstances: and the Particulars cannot be reckoned up here. Only, do nothing wicked by Way of Prevention; for Sin is worse than any temporal Suffering. Set not your Thoughts wholly on guarding against

^d 1 Cor. x. 13.

one Danger ; for there are many : nor against them all ; for your Attention ought to be divided amongst the several Duties of Life, that none may be neglected. Want not to be securer, than the State, in which we live, will allow : but let it suffice you, that the World is governed by the Providence of God. Pray to him, and cheerfully put your Interests into his Hands, and all will end well. *Be not afraid of sudden Fear—when it cometh : for the Lord shall be thy Confidence, and shall keep thy Foot from being taken^e. The Fear of the wicked shall come upon him : but the Desire of the righteous shall be granted^f. The Fear of Man bringeth a Snare ; but whose putteth his Trust in the Lord shall be safe^g.*

These Assurances hold good more especially with Respect to one Fear, that of Death, which deserves to be mentioned separately. We should always live in the Thought of it : but many live in the Dread also ; and dread it on Occasions where there is not even the smallest Hazard of it. And sometimes their very Alarms, sometimes the useless and hurtful Precautions, which they take in Consequence of them, hasten it. These Things are evident-

^e Prov. iii. 25, 26. ^f Prov. x. 24. ^g Prov. xxix. 25.

ly in a high Degree unwise: and a moderate Use of Reason, one should think, might check them. But be we ever so prudent, it will come. And Numbers are terrified with the great Pain, which they fancy it must bring with it. But this, as far as ever we have room to judge from Appearances, is quite a groundless Imagination: and there are very few who have not undergone, perhaps many Times over, more bodily Sufferings already, than they will in the Hour of their Dissolution. Still, were Death to end our Being, the View of it to good Persons would be a melancholy one indeed. But, God be thanked, *our Saviour Jesus Christ hath abolished Death, and brought Life and Immortality to Light through the Gospel*^h. Impenitent Sinners, I own, instead of Comfort, have only Cause from hence for unspeakably worse Terror. And strong Warnings of it are kindly given them in holy Writ. *Be not afraid of them, that kill the Body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom you shall fear: Fear him, who, after he hath killed, hath Power to cast into Hell: yea, I say unto you, Fear him*ⁱ. Nor is there, in the whole Creation, any Cure

^h 2 Tim. i. 10.ⁱ Luke xii. 4, 5.

for this Fear, but Repentance and Faith, and Christian Obedience to God's Laws : and these are a perfect Cure. For our blessed Redeemer hath condescended to die, that they who believe in him and keep his Commandments may live in Happiness for ever : or, to express it in the Words of Scripture, *that, through Death, he might destroy him, that had the Power of Death, that is, the Devil ; and deliver them, who, through Fear of Death, were all their Life-time subject to Bondage*^k.

4. The last Trial of our Patience, of which I proposed to speak, is Anger. With ourselves we are seldom angry enough, when we do amiss : and yet we may be too angry at our own Faults, as well as too much grieved for them. Of this latter Excess I treated under the second Head : and the Observations and Directions, there laid down, may without Difficulty be applied here. I shall now, therefore, discourse only of Anger against others ; and that more briefly, because I have lately treated that Subject at large. Take Notice then of the following Motives for moderating this Passion. Impatience of Pain, Excess of Sorrow and Fear, hurt only or chiefly ourselves,

^k Heb. ii. 14, 15.

with whom we have the best Right to make free ; and seldom provoke any one else to do us Harm : but Excess of Anger injures others, which is a great Sin ; and excites them to Revenge, which is a great Folly in us. We have surely Failings and Sufferings enough besides ; and need not add to them thus. But indeed, without looking so far, Anger in its very Nature, is tormenting : and, when immoderate or frequent, sours our Tempers, embitters our Lives, wears out our Frame, lowers our Character, lessens our Influence, thwarts our Interests, multiplies our Difficulties, hurries us into Dangers, even of our Lives, in more Ways than one. Plainly therefore we are concerned, on many Accounts, to restrain it within the Limits of Reason and Religion, by every Method in our Power : by serious Considerations of Duty to him, who requires it of us, and of Gratitude to him, who is so patient and long-suffering towards us ; by cultivating Good-will to our Fellow-creatures, by reflecting on the Frailty of human Nature, on our own innumerable Frailties and Errors, in Behaviour to others ; which we doubtless must wish to have gently passed over

over by them ; and therefore ought to be gentle ourselves. We should endeavour by prudent and mild Treatment of those with whom we are concerned, by discreet Vigilance over them, by friendly Instructions and Admonitions given them, to prevent their acting wrongly by us : and, if they do, notwithstanding, we should consider calmly, and without Exaggeration, the Degree of the Fault committed, hear and weigh their Defences and Excuses, make Use of cool Expostulations to convince and reform them ; and employ others in this good Work, who may be more likely to do it well and successfully, if we have any Cause to distrust our own Temper or Weight. And amongst other Things we should frequently recollect, how happy and pleased with ourselves we have been afterwards, when we have resisted and overcome Incitements to unreasonable Rage, and how miserable and full of fruitless Remorses, when we have yielded to them.

But besides the Directions more peculiarly appropriated to each of the four Temptations to be impatient, which I have mentioned, there are some scarcely touched upon yet, which in a
good

good Measure belong to them all. One is, to think often how possible it is, that more or fewer of these Temptations may sooner or later come to our Share. Were we indeed to imagine it more probable than it is, that many of them would, this might sink our Spirits, and weaken our Strength ; our *Hearts failing us for Fear, and for looking after those Things, which perhaps, are not coming*¹. But previously considering in a reasonable Manner, to what Sort of Accidents we are liable, will guard us against the vain Imagination of being exempt from Evil, prevent us from being alarmed, surpris'd, and cast down by it, *as though some strange Thing happened unto us*^m, and gradually reconcile us to the Lot of Humanity : we shall be ready and prepared for whatever may fall out ; recollect immediately, that no Trial hath overtaken us, *but such as is common to Men*ⁿ ; and resist all Emotions of immoderate Vehemence, *knowing that the same Afflictions are accomplished in our Brethren that are in the World*^o. Another Direction is, that under a long Continuance of Pain, or Grief, or Fear, or Provocations to Anger, if we find that by

¹ Luke xxi. 26.^m 1 Pet. iv. 12.ⁿ 1 Cor. x. 13.^o 1 Pet. v. 9.

the mere Use of Arguments from Prudence, Virtue, or Religion, we cannot get the better of them, but are in Danger of being overcome; we should try the Effect of turning our Attention from them for the present, as well as we are able, to other Subjects: undoubtedly to the best and most valuable that we can; but to any, that are innocent, rather than grow fretful, or despond. Only we must never take Refuge in Trifles out of Choice; but consider it as a Mark of Weakness, and Cause of Shame, that we are driven to them: and we must beware, that they never banish pious and serious Thoughts out of our Minds, or depreciate them in our Esteem.

Every one of these Rules, I trust, may assist us, more or less, to *run with Patience the Race that is set before us*^p, as the Apostle exhorts. But the great Assistance will be what in the next Words he directs, *Looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our Faith, who, for the Joy that was set before him, endured the Cross—and is set down at the right Hand of the Throne of God*^q. His first Disciples were enabled to bear Pain,

^p Heb. xii. 1.^q Ver. 2.

Sorrow,

Sorrow, Fear, Provocation, each of them in the highest Degree, from their cruel Persecutors, by *considering him, that endured such Contradiction of Sinners, lest they should be wearied and faint in their Minds*'. Well then may we, who have so much less to undergo, *possess our Souls in Patience* amidst it all. Indeed without Patience we cannot, in the lowest Sense, *possess our Souls*; be Masters of ourselves, and enjoy even the present Being, which God hath given us; the best Things will be tasteless, most Things bitter; we shall torment ourselves, and repine against him. But if we watch over our Hearts, and apply to God, He will *strengthen us with all Might, according to his glorious Power, unto all Patience and long Suffering with Joyfulness*': Tribulation will work Patience; and Patience, Experience; and Experience, Hope; and Hope will not make us ashamed'. For not only shall we possess our Souls in Comfort here, but if, as St. James enjoins, we *let Patience have her perfect Work*", we shall secure the Possession of endless Felicity hereafter. For God will give to them, who by patient Continuance in

' Ver. 3.

' Col. i. 11.

' Rom. v. 3, 4, 5.

" Jam. i. 4.

well-doing seek for Glory, and Honour, and Immortality, eternal Life *. Therefore, *having heard the Word, keep it, and bring forth Fruit with Patience* † : and the Lord direct your Hearts into the Love of God and the patient waiting for Christ ‡. For ye have Need of Patience, that after ye have done the Will of God, ye may receive the Promise ‡.

* Rom. ii. 7.

* Luke viii. 15.

† 2 Thess. iii. 5.

‡ Heb. x. 36.

S E R M O N X.

PHIL. iv. 11.

*—I have learned, in whatsoever State I am,
therewith to be content.*

YOU have lately been exhorted to the Duty of Patience : which consists in bearing well such Things, as immediately and necessarily give Uneasiness : and now I proceed to that of Contentment under such, as disturb us only on Reflection and Comparison. One should think, that they who need not suffer any Thing, would not ; yet very often such, as feel no positive Evil, that is worth naming, are very far from being at Ease. Multitudes are dissatisfied, and some extremely miserable, with very little other Cause for it, than the unreasonable Workings of their own Minds. Instead of contriving to be as happy as they can in their Condition, which is plainly the

wise Part, they set themselves to find out, why they should be wretched in it, and accordingly become so. Were they only to desire with Moderation any proper good Thing, which they have not, or endeavour with Moderation to obtain it, this would be always void of Blame, often worthy of Praise: they would be pleased, perhaps improved also, if they succeeded; and composed, though they failed. But vain Man extends his Wishes and his Claims far beyond these Bounds: and will enjoy no Peace within, because he is not, in this or that Respect, what he might have been, or what others are.

But suppose he were all that he wishes, how doth he know, that he should not quickly wish for more, with the same tormenting Eagerness, or that his Wishes would ever end? For there would be just the same Ground for new ones. His Complaint at present is, not that he positively suffers any Thing, but that he wants something. Now something is, and must be always, wanting to finite Beings, be they raised ever so high: else they would be infinite. The fallen Angels were unspeakably above human Rank; yet they felt a Deficiency, and absurdly repined at it; Heaven
was

was not good enough for ~~them~~, and so they were cast down to Hell. Men imagine, that were they but in such or such a State, they should never be tempted to think of any Thing more. But this is only a Sign, that they do not know themselves. In Proportion as their Situation was raised, their Prospect would be enlarged: and they would long to be Masters of all within their View. Success would encourage them to hope for greater Success yet: and besides, they would be disappointed in the Felicity they promised themselves from what they have got; but instead of learning from thence, in what real Felicity lies, would go on to seek for it in something else; and be at least as remote from it, as they were before. We see this perpetually, or with the smallest Attention may see it, in the Case of others: and it is astonishing Partiality, that we cannot believe it would be our own. Nay, perhaps we see it is our own Case, as far as we have advanced hitherto: and yet are weak enough to imagine it would be quite otherwise, could we but advance a few Steps more: whereas in Truth, he that is uneasy merely because he hath not all he would, never will be easy till he grows wiser.

Happily we none of us disquiet ourselves about every Thing that we have not. If we did, how blameable and how pitiable should we be! We all know Numbers of Things, that we should be very glad of, and yet can bear the Want of them very well: and why not the Want of others as well? What is impossible, it would be Madness to covet. What we cannot obtain, is the same in Relation to us, as if it were impossible in itself. Therefore we should never think of it. And what is very unlikely to be got, should scarcely be more minded, than if we knew that absolutely we could not get it. But you will say, how shall we put these Things out of our Minds? Turn them to something else. Recollect the Comforts that you have, and rejoice in them. All of us have many such. Reasonably good Health, wholesome Food and refreshing Sleep, a Provision of the other Necessaries of Life, a Share of its Conveniences, Acquaintance that are agreeable to us, Friends that wish us well, and, upon Occasion, would shew it, Opportunities of easy and chearful Conversation, the good Opinion and Esteem of those about us, the very Sight of the Sun and the View of the Face of Nature,

ture, are Things, every one of them designed and fitted to give us Pleasure, if we would but be so kind to ourselves as to take it. Consciouſness, that through the Grace of God's holy Spirit we mean, and on the Whole behave well, Persuasion that, through the Merits of his blessed Son, we are interested in his Favour, Hopes that his fatherly Providence will watch over us here, and his Goodness make us perfectly happy hereafter, these are Blessings of a higher Order, which we all may have ; and as no one ought to be, or with Reason can be, content without them, so every one surely may well be content with them ; and think himself enough distinguished by such Mercies, let him have ever so few Advantages besides. And we should accustom ourselves to look, more than we do, on the bright Side of our Condition ; not in order to grow vain and contemptuous upon it, which is the common Use that is made of contemplating it, but to enjoy it with humble Complacency, We should place a just Value on all our greater Comforts : and fetch out of the very least as much as they will afford us. Applying our Minds to become easy and satisfied is evidently right : but why should

we reason ourselves into being miserable, and resolve not to be the better for any Thing, because we have not this or that ?

Perhaps indeed you will allow, that grieving merely because you are not possessed of Things, that are plainly above you, is very blameable ; and will alledge, that you are not guilty of it ; that you are willing to be inferior both to what you might have been, and to what many others are. But still you will plead, that such and such have no Title to Pre-eminence over you, or even Equality with you : yet they have obtained it, and that you cannot bear. Now consider ; these very Persons, who give you Dissatisfaction and Envy, if you knew all, you might see Cause to pity. You know not how little Delight they may have in all their seeming Advantages ; or what Sufferings they may on one Account or another undergo ; nay, how dearly they may pay for what you imagine to be a principal Part of their Felicity. For usually there are great Deductions to be made from all Appearances of Prosperity amongst Men ; and often they, whose outward Shew is most admired, are the most wretched within. Indeed, though doubtless there are many, with whom you would wish

with to change some Things, there are few, if any, with whom you would consent to an intire Change; and take their Person, their Age, their Health, their Temper, their Situation, their Employment, their Connections, their Vexations, their Hazards, their Circumstances of all Kinds, for yours. And if you scarce know, with whose Condition, upon the Whole, you would be better pleased; why are you not pleased with your own? For surely, it would be too unreasonable to desire, that you should pick and chuse from each only what you like, and unite it all in yourself.

But further, your Condition is just what it is, let that of others be what it will: supposing they enjoy more, or suffer less, than you; still your Enjoyments and Sufferings are just the same, as if this were quite the Reverse. And why do you set yourself to think the contrary, and disquiet yourself with a false Imagination? There will, and there must be Inequalities in the World. Nothing can prevent it, but continual Miracles: and if it were prevented and we were all on a Level, we should probably, on the Whole, have great Cause to be sorry. Think then: why is it
2 harder,

harder, that you should be inferior to others, than that they should be inferior to you? Would your State be ever the better, if theirs were made worse? Would you wish theirs to be worse, that you might have Comfort in the Comparison? If you would, yours is already much better than you deserve. Impatience and excessive Agitation, under great Pain, Sorrow, Fear, Provocation, is at some Times, and in some Degree, hardly possible to be avoided, and therefore excusable. But the Discontent of those, who have no such Evils to complain of, is of their own Choice: they might be easy if they would. And resolving not to be so, because they imagine others are more so than they, is not only Unreasonableness, but Ill-will and Malice. The Torment, which they feel, is a guilty one: it punishes them justly here; and they will be liable, for indulging so unchristian, so inhuman, a Temper, instead of *rejoicing with them that rejoice*^a, to far severer Punishments hereafter.

But you will say perhaps, that your Inferiority in this or that Particular makes you despised: and who can bear Contempt? But indeed scarce any one is despised for being

^a Rom. xij. 15.

what he is, and cannot help being, but only for affecting to be what he should not or cannot be. The lowest in all Respects may be useful; and if they behave properly, will be valued according to their Usefulness. At least they can never deserve Contempt: and the Consciousness that they do not, will enable them to slight and overlook the little they may meet with: and indeed often to despise those who despise them. For worldly Advantages only serve to lessen the Esteem of such as use them ill: and some of the greatest, and, in their own and the vulgar Opinion, the most accomplished, are often the farthest of all People from being truly respectable.

But probably you will plead further, that the Persons, who excite your Dissatisfaction, are vicious, or at least unworthy of their Pre-eminences: and they will do Harm with them, or however little or no Good. Now in all Likelihood you think them worse, or less worthy than they are: they may have good Qualities with their Faults, though you are unwilling to see them; and you certainly have Faults with your good Qualities, though you are desirous to overlook them: and how much better

better you are upon the Whole than they, it may perhaps be neither easy nor safe for you to judge. But be they ever so bad, Providence may over-rule them, and keep them from executing their bad Purposes, or may use them for its Instruments, to correct the Faults of others that are as bad, or exercise the Virtues of others, who are much better ; possibly to correct and exercise you. Therefore do not fail under the Trial. But is this Fear of their doing Harm the real Motive of your Discontent, or only an Excuse for it to others and yourself ?

You will probably reply, that however that be, had you had such and such Advantages, which you have not, you would have done a great deal of Good. But perhaps others will do it in your Stead : and you may if you will, and you certainly should, take Pleasure in it, by whomsoever done, and not repine at it. But it may be you would not have been able to do the Good you fancy, and would only have brought Disquiet on yourself by attempting it. Nay, it may be, you would not have attempted it : for Difference of Circumstances makes a great Difference in the Ways of thinking of the same Persons ; and we often do
not

not prove to be what we fully imagined we should.

Still, at least, you will say, what you wish for would make you very happy : and therefore you regret the Want of it. But regret it as little as possible, and be as happy as you can without it. Perhaps you would be scarcely, perhaps not at all, happier than you are. Multitudes find this to be true every Day : they obtain what they desire ; and very soon after, if not instantly, perceive that their Condition is never the better for it. But they are thought happy, you will say, and admired or envied : and that alone is a desirable Thing. Now surely it is very poor Comfort, indeed it is rather an Aggravation of Sorrow, when we feel our Condition wretched or insipid, to have it thought joyful and desirable : to be congratulated on our Situation, when we know it is a Subject of Condoleance ; and so to have Pity from none, but the ill Will of many, to load us with more Uneasiness, when we inwardly groan under too much already. The wise King saith, *Wrath is cruel, and Anger is outrageous : but who can stand before Envy*^b ? Our Desire of producing it in others is im-

^b Prov. xxvii. 4.

Amoral; for it is a Desire of giving them Pain: and the Imprudence fully equals the Guilt. For all Pre-eminences, especially when accompanied with Ostentation of them, or too visible Complacence in them, to which all who have them are extremely subject, stir up Malignity in the Observers of them: who often find Means to make those very miserable, whom they would have let alone, and suffered to go on quietly, if they had not been provoked by thinking them over-happy.

But supposing the Advantages, which you pine for, whatever they be, would raise no Malice against you, but only Admiration of you: how often hath that, nay even the Shadow of it, mere Flattery, made Persons vain and indiscreet, misled them into great Errors, and plunged them into grievous Misery!

Indeed, without either, all Sorts of Superiority carry their Dangers along with them. If you were placed in a higher Station, perhaps you would be at a Loss how to behave in it; for there are many Difficulties in all such; you would be found by others, you would find yourself, in one Respect or another, unequal to it: or if not, it might tempt you to Pride and Abuse of Power. If you were
possessed

possessed of great Wealth, it might lead you, for it hath led many, either to endless Desires of still more; or to Expensiveness and thoughtless Extravagance, that would end in Distress; or to Sensuality and vicious Indulgences, or to contemptible Indolence and Uselessness. Accomplishments of Person expose the Possessors of them to immoderate Self-esteem, to Neglect of useful Attainments, to Dissipation of their Time, often in the unfittest Company, to improper Freedoms, to great Hazards of their Reputation and their Innocence. Health and Strength encourage Men to venture upon Irregularities, that prove ruinous to both, and to their Fortunes at the same Time; whilst they, whom Infirmary obliges to be careful, prolong their Days in Comfort. Strength of Genius, and Extent of Knowledge, often bewilder Persons in fruitless Researches, or prompt them to dangerous and hurtful Singularities of Opinion: Quickness of Parts, and Agreeableness in Conversation, frequently betray them into grievous Imprudences of various Kinds, contrary to their own Interest, to the Peace of those around them, to Piety, Morals, and common Decency.

But

But whatever may happen to others, you think you should enjoy all the Benefits of these Pre-eminences, and avoid all the Evils incident to them. But why do you think so? You are just of the same Make with the rest of Mankind, and liable to all their Frailties. Your Confidence in yourself is a Mark, not of Ability, but of Weakness and Ignorance in a Point of the greatest Consequence. If you were but humbler, you would be much safer: and one material Source of Safety would be Content. For Discontent brings People into Mischiefs innumerable. It is a painful State in itself: preys upon the Spirits, deadens the Sense of every Enjoyment in Life, sours the Temper, and produces great Wickedness, as well as Misery.

Displeasure with their own Condition tempts many to aim at bettering it unlawfully, by Force or Fraud: and dreadful must the Uneasiness be, which can drive them to a Method of Relief, so evidently criminal. For however some may pretend they cannot see what Right others have to enjoy so much more of the World than themselves; yet let but any one, who hath less Enjoyment of it, apply this Reasoning to them, and act upon it, then
they

they can perceive exceeding plainly, that his Dislike of his own Circumstances in any Respect, is no Manner of Reason, or Excuse, for his using other than honest Means to mend them. For why should their Property, their Character, their Quiet, suffer, because he is uneasy? And yet, what dreadful Havock is there often made of all these from no better a Motive! The Kings and Princes of the Earth ravage Nations, murder and distress Millions; the powerful and wealthy, of lower Degree, oppress and injure their Fellow-creatures in more Ways, than can be reckoned up, merely to obtain Advantages, perhaps to which they have no Title, certainly which they of all Men least need, solely because they cannot rest without them; though at the same Time they have no Satisfaction, worth naming, from them. And in lower Life, what Numbers are there, who disturb their Neighbours, to a great Extent sometimes, and put Things in a Ferment all around them, only to carry some Point, which possibly they ought not to carry, or which is of little Use to them; nay, it may be, only to grieve some innocent Object of their Resentment, or to find any Employ-

ment, rather than none, which may divert for a Time, the inward Chagrin, that devours them ! So baneful are the Fruits of Discontent.

But when it is not carried so far, it is often very blameable : as when it incites Men to importune and teize others for Favours, to which they have no sufficient Pretensions ; which is giving them Trouble, sometimes a great deal, without any Right to do it. And then the next Step usually is, complaining, and being angry, and wanting to be revenged on such, as have not done every Thing for us that we wanted ; though possibly they have done more than we care to own ; or they know or find they cannot do what we wish, or are no Way obliged to it, or have Obligations to the contrary ; as they easily may, of more Kinds than one.

But even supposing we strive to keep our Discontent to ourselves, yet if it rise within us to Envy against others, this is a great Sin. Barely indeed feeling our own Disadvantages or Disappointments, the more strongly on the View of another Person's Pre-eminence or Success, is hardly avoidable, and may be nearly

or quite innocent. Wishing our own Condition were as good, as we take his to be, is not wishing ill to him, but only well to ourselves. But if we grieve, not that we do not enjoy what we would, but that he doth; or secretly rejoice in the Sight, or the Thought of any Misfortune, that may bring him down lower and nearer to us: not only we shall be tempted to do ill, if we can, to one whom we wish ill to; but the Wish itself is Malice, unprovoked by any Injury, (for his Superiority to us is no Injury;) the directly contrary Disposition to that Love and good Will, which is, under all Provocations, the great Precept of Humanity and of the Gospel.

Nay further, though we feel no Malevolence at all against any one else, yet if the comparative Disadvantages of our Condition fill us with Emotion and inward Agitation, we are still in a wrong State of Mind. It may seem perhaps, that our Desire of any Thing, apprehended to be good, must be strong, in Proportion as we apprehend it to be a great Good. But in Reality, we have no Desire at all for Things that are quite above us; partly, to be sure, because we have no distinct Notions of them;

but partly also, because we look on them as not belonging to us. Now would we but consider whatever we certainly cannot have, in the same Light, and whatever we probably cannot have, in nearly the same, it would save us great Uneasiness and Guilt. The Condition of many, who are much discontented about it, is in Truth almost as good as this World admits; for it doth not admit any high Happiness: and what can they get then by disquieting themselves that it is not better? Moderate Desires will excite reasonable Endeavours to mend it, if there appears Room: and immoderate ones will only add Vexation. Sometimes the Vehemence of our Pursuit is the very Cause that we miss our Aim. And were it always the likeliest Way to Success, yet when Disappointments happen, as they will frequently happen, it must aggravate the Sorrow of them very greatly. Nay, mere Delays may give eager Spirits much more Pain before they attain their Ends, than the Attainment will ever give them Pleasure afterwards. For every one experiences what yet no one will believe, against the next Time, that the largest Increase of worldly Advantages is commonly little or no Increase,

Increase, but often a Diminution, of Self-Enjoyment: though indeed were this otherwise, bringing down our Wishes to Reason is so much the surer and more practicable Method of being easy, than bringing every Thing to yield to our Wishes, that it scarce needs the further Recommendation of being the more virtuous Method also.

Still, paying some Attention to our worldly Interests, is a requisite Part of Wisdom; and it may be very blameable, not to stretch out our Hand and take what Providence offers. But to covet with Earnestness, and pursue with Impetuosity, an Object that seems to fly from us, when God alone knows what it may prove, if we should overtake it, is generally, if not universally, presumptuous and rash. Yet this is the Course that we commonly take. Whatever we see others follow, we follow too, just as fast, without asking ourselves why; encourage our wild Fancies, instead of checking them; fill our Hearts with imaginary Wants, and become as eager for Multitudes of Things one after another, all which we might do very well without, as if the whole Felicity of our Being consisted in them. If Men allow them-

selves in such Behaviour, all that Success can do for them, is to engage them still deeper in the same Folly. For these Cravings have no End, and therefore should be curbed and quieted in the Beginning.

But though Men are not vehemently agitated by Discontent, yet if they are dejected and sunk by it, mourn over the Disadvantages of their Condition, and live in a State of Affliction, be it ever so calm Affliction, on Account of them, even this is by no means right. It may indeed sometimes be in a great Measure, mere bodily Disease : or it may, when the Degree of it is low, be the Fault of one, who is, on the Whole, virtuous and good. But still it shews an undue Attachment to this World, yet unfits Persons at the same Time both for the Comforts to be enjoyed, and the Duties to be done in it. If indulged to any considerable Length, it may disorder not only the Temper, but the Understanding. And to strange Lengths it sometimes runs in People, of whom one must think, that if they have Cause to lament, it is hard to say, who hath Cause to be satisfied.

Or suppose the various Disadvantages of Men

to be as great as they think them ; yet Happiness doth not arise from outward Circumstances, or the Accomplishments usually admired : else how unspeakably happy would the rich and great, the learned and ingenious, the beautiful and gay be, who all, at Times, confess themselves to be far from it ; and how miserable the rest of Mankind, who, God be thanked, relish their Being very comfortably ! Every State hath not only its Inconveniences, but its Consolations : and the discontented would see this, if they did not perversely look solely at the former in their own Case, and the latter in that of others : magnify what they themselves want, and under-rate what they have ; over-value what their Neighbours enjoy, and forget to make Allowance for what perhaps they suffer. We know the worst of the Condition we are in : but what Evils belong to that which we wish to be in, we know not. Besides, every one cannot have every Thing, that he desires : and where is the greater Hardship, that we should fail of it, than that others should ? Many appear or succeed better, it may be : but many also not near so well. Would they have Cause to be

wretched, were they in our Circumstances ?
If not, why have we ?

But further yet : perhaps our Disadvantages proceed from ourselves : possibly it is our Virtue and our Honour that keeps us back from what we long for : and surely, the Possession of good Qualities ought to give us more Pleasure, than any Disappointments owing to them should give us Pain. Or possibly some Fault of ours produces what we complain of : our Negligence or Expensiveness brings us into Straits, our Imprudences create us Difficulties, our ill Temper makes Things uneasy round us, our Irregularities impair our Health and Spirits : correct these Errors, instead of repining at their Consequences, and all will be well.

It may be you will say indeed, that you have endeavoured to correct your Faults, but without Success ; and your chief Discontent is at yourselves. Now if this be really your Case, it is a very uncommon one. Many are dissatisfied with other Persons and Things, some with almost all about them ; but few with their own Temper and Conduct. Such as really take Pains to amend it, deserve great Esteem ;
and,

and, when they find the Work peculiarly difficult, as they often may, especially after long Indulgence, great Pity likewise. But though they should never be so far contented with themselves, as to cease from the Attempt of Reformation, yet, while they are sure they attempt it in Earnest, they should acquiesce very calmly, notwithstanding that their Progress is but slow. The Nature of all Men is both imperfect and corrupt : and that of some much more than of others. The Disparity of the Faculties of our Minds and the Dispositions of our Hearts is as great, as of our bodily Qualifications or external Circumstances : and every one must submit to his Lot in the former, as well as the latter ; for grieving and murmuring will make Nothing better in either. Those Creatures, which cannot at all improve themselves, appear to be content with being what they are : but we can improve ourselves greatly ; and if we labour to do it chiefly in what best deserves our Labour, Goodness and Virtue, we shall *out of Weakness be made strong*^c, provided we trust not presumptuously to our own Efforts, but humbly join with them, Faith in

^c Heb. xi. 34.

God, and Prayer for the Aid of his Holy Spirit, through the Mediation of Jesus Christ, *for his Grace shall be sufficient for us, and his Strength made perfect in our Weakness*^d. *Without him we can do nothing*^e: every wrong inclination, Dissatisfaction amongst others with every Thing within and without, in their Turns, will prevail over us: but *through Christ who strengtheneth us, we can do all Things*^f. To him we owe our Deliverance *from the Wrath to come*^g: and well may we be easy with an inferior Share of worldly Advantages; for the best of us deserve none. From him proceeds all the Good, that we think or do: and surely we have no Title to greater Abilities in any Respect, than he bestows on us. On him depend our Hopes of future Happiness: and the lowest Place in it is too high for us. Yet we know not how far we may advance in spiritual Attainments by modest Perseverance. We may be enabled in Time to out-do both ourselves and others, and be rewarded accordingly. But however that proves, it may abundantly suffice us all, that we shall *make our Calling and Election sure*^h, and *enter into some*

^d 2 Cor. xii. 9.^g Matth. iii. 7.^e John xv. 5.^h 2 Pet. i. 10.^f Phil. iv. 13.

Degree of *the Joy of our Lord*ⁱ, in Return for our faithful Improvement of the Talents committed to us, be they more or fewer, if in an *honest and good Heart, having heard the Word, we keep it, and bring forth Fruit with Patience*^k, though it be in very different Proportions, *some an hundred fold, some sixty, some thirty*^l.

ⁱ Matth. xxv. 21.^k Luke viii. 15.^l Matth. xiii. 8.

S E R M O N XI.

PSALM xxxix.ⁿ 10.

*I became dumb, and opened not my Mouth: for
it was thy doing.*

IT would be our Wisdom and our Duty, though we had no Knowledge of Religion, to bear the Sufferings of Life with Patience, and submit to the Inequalities of it with Contentment. I have therefore hitherto inforced upon you the Practice of these two Virtues chiefly from prudential and moral Considerations, though I could not altogether forbear adding some Inducements of Piety also. But these last are both so superior to the former, and so necessary in human Circumstances, that I must now dwell upon them distinctly.

Pains of the Body, and Uneasiness of the Mind.

Mind, may sometimes be so grievous, that, had we no invisible Sovereign to obey, and Nothing to hope or fear after Death, it would be hard to persuade ourselves to continue in Life. At least we should undergo in it a great deal of Misery, with few and poor Consolations. Those indeed, which I have mentioned to you, are in many Cases of considerable Use by themselves : in all Cases they may be of Service, when combined with Reflections of a higher Nature. And our groveling Minds are often more affected with feeble Reasons, that are level to them ; than with strong ones, that seem above them : or however may best be quieted a while by a previous Use of the former, till they can be raised to an Ability of applying the latter. And Humanity requires, that even the weakest Aid be called in : but at the same Time, that the principal Stress be laid on the firmest Support : else what will be the Consequence ? Only indeed what most of us in our Turns have probably experienced. We have been told that Grieving would not help us, without being told what would ; and so have been left to grieve on. We have been told, that sooner or later our Sufferings would abate, which

which is small Satisfaction in the mean while ; or that they would be short, because our Lives are so, which is leaving us to be miserable, as long as we are any Thing. We have been told perhaps, that Pain is no Evil, and Virtue is its own Reward in all Circumstances, when we were actually feeling the contrary : or that others were as wretched as we, or even more so ; as if that could make our Wretchedness cease. We have been bid to turn our Thoughts from our Sorrows to Amusements ; when we could not, if we would ; and possibly should have abhorred to do it, if we could. Sage Maxims and Counsels of various and contradictory Sorts, have been urged upon us, which had no Authority or Weight to make their Way into our Hearts : but we have remained in the Condition, which poor *Job* expresses to his Friends : *I have heard many such Things : miserable Comforters are ye all* *. Or though Men have ever so few Sufferings, yet, without religious Views, they may have so few Enjoyments, and those so low, that a rational Soul must disdain them, and feel its Existence to be insipid and unsatisfactory. Or, however content, upon Force, to acquiesce

* Job xvi. 2.

after a Sort in our own Condition, we may still either be persuaded, that the general State of Things upon the Whole is wrong and unhappy, or doubt so greatly whether it be right and good, that the World may appear very gloomy and comfortless to a benevolent Mind.

If therefore we desire to pass through it with Complacency, we must extend our Thoughts further; like the Psalmist in the Text; and consider ourselves, as in the Hands of God: for then, whatever happens, or whatever is wanting, to us or to any one, we shall see Cause to submit to it, composedly and placidly, without objecting. *I became dumb, and opened not my Mouth: for it was thy doing.*

The Creator of all Things is evidently, as such, Lord of all Things: and hath a Right to place us in what Station, and expose us to what Accidents he pleases; provided the Being, which he hath given us, be not, on the Whole, without our Fault, worse than not being. For *who art thou, O Man, that repliest against God? shall the Thing formed say unto him that formed it, Why hast thou made*

me thus^b ? Is it not lawful for him to do what he will with his own^c ? He can have no Need, no Temptation to use us unjustly : and, without any, we never use one another so : which Knowledge alone is enough to produce in us a considerable Degree of dutiful Submission. If what we dislike in our Condition were the Effect of mere Chance or fatal Necessity, we might rebel in our Hearts against it. But a Principle of yielding to the lawful Authority of an almighty Ruler is Part of human Nature. Our Circumstances perhaps are disadvantageous, or even our Sufferings great. But if we look diligently into our Temper and Behaviour, have we not deserved all that we undergo, have we not deserved much worse ? And if so, surely we should say in our Hearts, with poor penitent *Eli*, *It is the Lord ; let him do what seemeth him good^d :* and with *Jeremiah*, *Wherefore doth a living Man complain, a Man for the Punishment of his Sins ? Let us search and try our Ways, and turn again to the Lord^e.* Perhaps also, the Uneasiness, which we feel, whether inflicted for our Transgressions or not, is more than overbalanced by

^b Rom. ix. 20.
Lam. iii. 39, 40.

^c Matth. xx. 15.

^d 1 Sam. iii. 18.

the Comforts that we enjoy. Our Impatience may lead us into great Mistakes in this Matter: but God is liable to none. Or if, at present, Wretchedness preponderates, he can easily make us a Compensation, either here or hereafter: nay, if Justice requires it, he certainly will. And *it is good, that a Man should both hope, and quietly wait for the Salvation of the Lord*^f. In the Midst of Heathen Darkeness indeed, there may to some have seemed Cause of Doubt, especially on trying Occasions, whether the Administration of Things were just or not; and, supposing it to be so on the Whole, whether it was or could be so in Regard of each particular Person. Now these, the more Love and Zeal they had for what was right, the more they must be dissatisfied with what appeared to be wrong: and therefore might be excusable in a Degree, if they murmured against the Dispensations of Providence towards themselves, or others. Some again, impatient of the Evils of this Life, ignorant of the Means of procuring Strength to bear them, and perhaps also doubtful at best of another to reward them, might, without any heinous Depravity, yield

^f Lam. iii. 26.

to the Temptation of thinking themselves allowed or even called, by the Author of their Beings, to put a voluntary End to them, whenever they were oppressed by Sufferings hard to support. But in the clearer Light of our Days, either of these Dispositions would be unspeakably more criminal.

Yet, were we only to believe, that God will do us no Wrong, our Submission to his Will, though it might well be full of the profoundest Reverence, would not be accompanied with the highest Degree of Esteem. But happily he hath also shewn us great Kindness. For every Pleasure that we enjoy, every Capacity of receiving Pleasure that belongs to our inward or outward Frame, proceeds from his Bounty. And how do we commonly behave upon it? Yield ourselves up to his Disposal with a chearful Trust in him? No: repine and complain, that he hath not done more for us, or that he doth not continue to us all that we ever had. But every Thing is more than we are intitled to. We have no Property in any Thing: we ourselves are his Property. Our very Being is not our own: He bestowed it, and whatever we possess in it, and that only during his Pleasure: he may allow us as few Comforts, or mix with

them as many Afflictions as he will. *Shall we receive Good at the Hand of God, and shall we not receive Evil?* All that he granted, he may withdraw at any Time: and our Concern is only to say with *Job*, *The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the Name of the Lord*^h. He might have made any one of us the very lowest of his Creation: and if the meanest of the Works of his Hands hath a Claim to more than he hath vouchsafed, it hath an equal Claim to more without End: and if it is not bound to Resignation at present, can never be bound to it in any Situation at all.

But though the Sovereignty of God is absolute, we know not that he ever uses it in an arbitrary Manner. The Scripture tells us in express Terms, that he *doth not willingly afflict or grieve the Children of Men*ⁱ. And to think, that he limits the Happiness of the least happy of his Creatures without Cause, would be entertaining a disrespectful Notion of his glorious Attributes. *Manifold as his Works are, yet in Wisdom hath he made them all*^k: and *the Earth is full of the Goodness of the Lord*^l. The farther Men see into whatever he hath done or appointed, the more Evidence they discern of

^h Job ii. 10.ⁱ Job i. 21.^l Lam iii. 33.^k Ps. civ. 24.^l Ps. xxxiii. v.

Foreſight and Skill, of Bounty and Mercy : and therefore ought firmly to believe they take Place, even where they ſee them not. Such and ſuch Things we are apt to imagine might have been contrived more for our particular Advantage. Yet perhaps we miſtake : and what we wiſh either could not have been at all, (for many Things may be impoſſible, which we do not perceive to be ſo) or would not have been the better for us. Our Inſight into Conſequences reaches but a very little Way. In Multitudes of Caſes we are full as ignorant of what would be for our Benefit, as Children are of what would be for theirs : and ought therefore to acquieſce in the Will and the Knowledge of our heavenly Father, as we expect them to acquieſce in ours.

But ſuppoſing that granting every one of our Deſires would be an Act of Kindneſs to us : yet *the Lord is good to all, and his tender Mercies are over all his Works* ^m. Very often it is viſible, that, if we ſucceed in our Wiſhes, others muſt fail in theirs : were we to have this or that Advantage, they muſt be under proportionable Diſadvantages. And why is it not as conſiſtent with the Wiſdom and the

Goodness of God to regard their Interests, as ours? Perhaps we deserve it no better, perhaps not so well. Or if we did, or if it appeared not who would be hurt by greater Indulgence to us, it doth not follow, that no one would; and that no Inconvenience to any Part, or in any Respect, would arise from it. In this wide World the Connections of Things are innumerable: and may be very important, where they are absolutely hidden from our View, who probably discern but an inconsiderable Portion of them. Subordinations are necessary in every System of every Kind. The low Rank and Helplessness of many Creatures fits them for our Use; our Advantages proceed from their Sufferings; from the very Sufferings which we inflict on them; yet they are totally ignorant of this: and how know we, what Advantages may, some Way, though quite different and quite inconceivable to us, proceed from our low Rank and our Sufferings? And as God hath wisely and kindly made so many Orders of Beings beneath us; why may it not be as wisely and kindly, notwithstanding we are ignorant on what Account, that he hath made us just such as we are, and no higher or happier?

But though, in all Likelihood, we can see only a few of the Reasons of God's Ways, yet several we may see, at least in some Measure. For Instance: He governs the World by general Laws. On some Occasions indeed he hath openly departed from them, and wrought Miracles: on many, we have Cause to think he secretly restrains and varies them for gracious Purposes, or just Correction: but were he not to observe them in the ordinary Course of Things, we should neither know, what to expect, nor how to proceed. If solid Bodies did not weigh downwards, if Bodies in Motion did not communicate their Motion to others, if Winds had not a strong Force, if Rain was not carried about by them, if Fire did not heat and consume, if sharp Instruments did not cut, the whole Frame of Nature would be disordered, and stop. If what tends to destroy our Lives or our Healths did not give us Pain, we should take no sufficient Care to avoid it. If any one Thing almost, that we know, were to fail of commonly producing its natural Effect, very general Mischiefs, or however Inconveniences, would follow: and yet, if they are left to pro-

duce their Effects, grievous Distresses to Particulars, from Time to Time, must be the Consequence. Therefore we should learn to respect the Regulations of Providence, though occasionally we suffer by them. We honour, if we are at all reasonable, whatever Laws of our Country we know to be for the common Good, though often greatly opposite to our own private Interest: and surely less Honour cannot be due to the Laws of Heaven.

He, who could make such a World as this, may doubtless have, throughout his Conduct of it, wise and good Ends in his View, of which we cannot possibly form any Conception. Were God to question us, as once he did *Job*; *Where wast thou, when I laid the Foundations of the Earth? declare, if thou hast Understanding*^a: our Answer must be, what one of his Friends acknowledged, *We are of Yesterday, and know Nothing*^b: or as the Book of *Wisdom* expresses it more largely; *What Man is he, that can know the Counsel of God? or who can think, what the Will of the Lord is? For the Thoughts of mortal Men are miserable, and our Devices are but uncertain*^c. Indeed Creatures of our own Rank, only of Abilities perhaps a little

^a Job xxxviii. 4.^b Job viii. 9.^c Wisd. ix. 13. 14.

superior,

superior, lay Schemes of which we should never have the least Notion, and compass them by Methods which we should never suspect, if we were not told them. Now God hath not told us all his Ways, and all the Reasons of them. Therefore with Respect to many Things, we must apprehend him to say to us, as the blessed *Jesus* did to *Peter*: *What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter*^a. If we observe with Attention, and enquire with Humility, we shall find, sooner or later, in various Instances, even while we continue on this Earth, that seeming Evil is real Good in some Respect or other. But a future Life will draw back the Veil from Multitudes of the divine Dispensations, and shew us Beauty and Order, where Nothing appeared to us but Horror and Confusion. Yet even then we must not expect to know the Whole: nor are the highest Angels capable of fathoming all the Depths of the universal Providence of *the only wise God*^r.

Faith is the Evidence of Things not seen^s: and implicit Faith is one of the first and greatest Duties of Creatures to their Creator. We pay it to Men like ourselves every Day: and

^a John xiii. 7.
Jude. Verse 25.

^r Rom. xvi. 27. 1 Tim. i. 17.
^s Heb. xi. 1.

contentedly trust our Fortunes, our Healths, our Lives with them, in Consequence of it ; notwithstanding they may often mistake, nay sometimes mean us Ill. Surely then, without a single Murmur, without the least Hesitation, we may trust every Thing, trust Body and Soul with God. For are they wiser and better, are we wiser and better, than he ? Are we not safer in his Hands, than in our own ? He doth not do all for us, that we wish. But perhaps we wish indiscreetly for what would be much Harm to us. Or if not, we think it very fitting, that our Servants and Inferiors, when we command them, should undergo a great deal for the Accomplishment of our Purposes ; and that Multitudes of Persons, when required by Authority, should risque every Thing dear to them, for the general Welfare : why is it not fitting then, that we, in our Turn, should both give up Satisfaction, and bear Uneasinesses, to serve the good Purposes of God ? We are willing, I hope, to suffer more than a little for our Friends, for our Country, for our Prince : why should we not be as willing to suffer every Thing for the Sake of Mankind, and the System of which we are Part, when the Sovereign of all demands it ? We see not indeed perhaps, in what

what Manner our Sufferings or our Disadvantages benefit others, or make the general State of Things better. But *here is the Patience and the Faith of the Saints* '. Thus they have the Means of shewing Patience in every Situation, built on the Faith, that all Things are conducted well. So far they are conducted well for us, that in our lowest and most afflicted Condition, when the Face of God seems hid from us, his Eye watches over us ; and while his Hand is heaviest upon us, it is leading us to our proper Share of Happiness. Therefore, as the Apostle exhorts, *be content with such Things as ye have : for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee* ^u. But all Matters are conducted in the highest Degree well for the Whole : and doubting it is thinking ill of our heavenly Father ; for which we can never have Cause. Nothing can win upon him to do Wrong, Nothing deter him from doing Right, Nothing resist his Power ; Nothing mislead his Judgement, Nothing escape his Attention, who sees through the Universe at once. He hath fixed the proper Laws and Limits for every Part, and we have no Claim to be exempted. Therefore when we feel our-

' Rev. xiii. 10.

^u Heb. xiii. 5.

selves inclined to object, to be moved with Indignation, and *tear ourselves in our Anger*, as *Job's* Friends accuse him of doing, we should check our Vehemence, as they check his, by asking, *Shall the Earth be forsaken for Thee, and the Rock be moved out of its Place* * ? Shall the Foundations, on which the great System of Nature stands, and by which its good State is preserved, be shaken for the seeming, or the real, Benefit of this or that Person ? If of any one, why not of every one : for what are we more than others ? And then Nothing can follow, but universal Inconsistence and Confusion.

Still the Duty of Submission to God's good Pleasure doth not require from us Insensibility ; for we cannot be insensible, of what we undergo, or what we want, or what superior Advantages others enjoy. It doth not forbid us to think the present State of Things, were we not to look beyond it, irregular and disorderly ; provided we look on it as Part of a regular Whole, that is worthy of its Author. For the Afflictions and Inequalities of this Life, are a strong Argument for a future one. And though entertaining too low an Opinion

* Job xviii. 4.

of the Wisdom and Goodness, which appears now in the Administration of the World, may often proceed from a bad Temper, and produce or strengthen impious Opinions; yet some may undervalue or dislike beyond Reason what they see, merely because they conceive they are bound to excite in their Hearts the highest possible Esteem of what they hope for: and these, though mistaken, may be in the highest Degree religious. Again: Thinking with Complacency, how agreeable it would be to us, were Heaven to change our Lot in this or that Respect, or place us in the Condition of this or that Person; nay, wishing it were actually done, provided the Wish be formed on the Condition, that such were his Will, who knows best; nay, though that Condition be not always explicitly in our Thoughts, yet if we are habitually disposed never absolutely to desire that may be, which God sees fit should not be, we are still within the Bounds of Innocence. Indeed the further we suffer our Fancies and Inclinations to carry us in this Road, the more slippery Ground we continually tread upon: but thus far we may advance, and not fall. In Cases of positive Sufferings we may take yet another Step: may bemoan

bemoan ourselves, though not complain of God ; may express in our Devotions what he knows we cannot but feel, and lay before him our natural Cravings of Relief. For thus *David*, after the fullest, and undoubtedly sincerest, Profession of Resignation, made in the Text, immediately subjoins, *Take away thy Stroke from me : I am even consumed by Means of thy heavy Hand* *. Thus also good Persons in all Ages have sought and found Ease by submissive Applications to the Throne of Mercy. And if sometimes Expostulations have escaped them, which seem not submissive enough, their cooler Thoughts have doubtless corrected them, and no Failure can be intitled to a more favourable Construction. But if our Condition be a tolerably comfortable one, or might be such, if we would let it ; then we have much more Need to lower and suppress our Desires of further Advantages, than to inflame them by turning them into Prayers. Not that we sin, if we endeavour to raise ourselves into a still more agreeable Situation, or if we intreat God to bless our Endeavours, as far as he judges it convenient. Resignation is very different, not only from Despondence,

* Pf. xxxix. 11.

which rather implies Dissatisfaction and Distrust, but from Indolence, which may be totally destitute of any Sentiment of Piety. And though an indolent Person can perhaps be more easily resigned, yet an active one can be more certain, whether he is so in Reality, and from a Principle of Conscience. But the Activity exerted by us, when in good Circumstances, to improve them into better, should always be accompanied with peculiar Moderation of Desire : and if we may lawfully pray at all to be rich or great, or in any Respect eminent and admired ; we ought certainly to pray with far more Earnestness, that we may have Nothing that will endanger our Piety or Virtue ; but may always be humble and contented, and pleased with whatever the distributing Wisdom of the most High allots us.

Indulging ourselves in the contrary Disposition, is disputing with God the Government of his own World : and either denying him to be wise and good, or wishing that he were not, but would order Things ill for the Whole, that our Share might be more to our Mind. Now what a dreadful Sort of Spirit is this, and where can it end ? Therefore let us be satisfied

tified with the Place which he hath assigned us, and bear quietly the Burthens which he hath laid upon us. We often submit with very little Reluctance to the Treatment which we receive from unjust Men : why should we not submit without any to the Pleasure of a perfectly just God ? Could he ever be partial in our Favour, he might afterwards change his Mind, and be partial against us, and so we could never be secure of any Thing. But now *his Righteousness standeth like the strong Mountains*, which cannot be overturned ; at the same Time that *his Judgements are like the great Deep* ¹, which cannot be fathomed. *Clouds and Darkeness are round about him* : but *Righteousness and Judgement are the Habitation of his Throne* ².

Some Persons, it may be, are tempted to repine not so much at any Want of Happiness or Feeling of Misery, which they experience themselves ; as at the general Quantity of Wretchedness and Prevalence of Wickedness, which they observe in the World. *My Feet were almost gone, my Treadings had well nigh slipt. And why ? I was grieved at the wicked, I do also see the ungodly in such Prosperity* ³.

¹ Ps. xxxvi. 6.² Ps. xcvi. 2.³ Ps. lxxiii. 2, 3.

And indeed Concern on this Account seems not only on many Occasions useful in human Circumstances, but inseparable in human Nature from Benevolence and Love of Virtue. But this is only because our Nature is imperfect. For God sees infinitely more bad Things than we do, and feels an infinitely stronger Disapprobation of them, considered in themselves. Yet they cause not the least Diminution of his Happiness. For he knows, that, through the Direction of his wise Providence, they will be the Means of the greatest Good : and therefore we ought to believe it ; and be influenced by that Faith, as far as we are able. But many pretend, and perhaps imagine, that they are deeply concerned at the Growth of Crimes, and the Discouragements and Decay of Goodness, when in Truth their chief, if not only, Sorrow is, that their Party is not uppermost, or their Friends have not succeeded ; or such as they dislike, have : and were but these Things otherwise, the World might be as bad or worse than it is, without their being in the least uneasy at it. Some, on the other Hand, care very little, whether right or wrong Behaviour prevails amongst Men, and dignify their blameable Indifference with the specious

Name of Resignation. Now both these Faults must be avoided. The Cause, in which we are zealous, ought to be that of Piety and Virtue, and the Good of our Fellow-creatures: and for this we should have all the Zeal, that will excite us to such Behaviour in Support of it, as belongs to our Station. But we must neither attempt any Thing beyond proper Bounds; nor, if our justest Attempts prove unsuccessful, and Appearances in any particular Case, or in general, are ever so bad, must we either think ill of God; or worse of Men, than they deserve; or give Way to Impatience, or Despair, or immoderate Grief; but meekly *commit ourselves*, and every Thing, *to him that judgeth righteously*^b. Before we perceive what the Event of our Endeavours will be, we may entertain Hopes; but they must be conditional, *if the Lord will*^c, not absolute; and moderate not vehement. When we are disappointed, if our Desires were such as we need not have formed, we may justly be expected to give them up more intirely: if they were founded in our Nature, some involuntary Concern will be felt; and instead of being terrified at it, as heinous Guilt, we should gently, yet studiously, check

^b 1 Pet. ii. 23.^c James iv. 15.

it, as mere Weakness. But the Notion, that we either ought or may allowably indulge ourselves in Dissatisfaction or Grief, is utterly to be rejected. And the sooner and the more completely we quiet every painful Feeling, and bring our Minds to a calm Acquiescence in the good Pleasure of God ; the better we are, and the happier it will be for us.

Other Motives to bear Evil patiently and contentedly are to be sought for from different Quarters, as the Circumstances of the Case require ; are often hard to find ; and when found, have often small Weight and Influence. But Resignation to the Will of our gracious heavenly Father, is one and the same Inducement, that naturally presents itself to our Thoughts ; is equally suited to all Occasions ; and while it awes us with the Consideration of his absolutely sovereign Authority, soothes us with the Assurance, that *though he cause Grief, yet he will have Compassion, according to the Multitude of his Mercies*^d. Again : Resistance to the Purposes of our Fellow-creatures may frequently prevail : but Reluctance against those of our Maker never can. Therefore Sentiments of dutiful Submission spare us

^d Lam. iii. 32.

the Pain of unavailing inward Struggles, lessen every Suffering, prepare us for every Trial. If we will not yield with Meekness to the Disposal of God, how shall we bear Injuries from one another; how indeed shall we refrain from being injurious, when our Interests and Inclinations prompt us? The Practice of self-denying Duties, without leaning on Heaven for Support, is too hard a Task for human Nature. But such as not only believe the Precept, but have formed themselves to feel the Impressions of Resignation, are in Proportion superior to all Difficulties. Their Spirits are calm; and instead of plunging rashly into deeper Distresses and even Guilt, as the impatient do, they find their Way, if any one can be found, out of every Perplexity. By excluding eager Hopes and high Desires of earthly Good, this pious Principle excludes also jealous Envy, keen Resentment, tormenting Fears, bitter Disappointments, and final Dislike of every Thing. He that gives himself up into the Hands of God, with unfeigned Approbation of the Divine Conduct in whatever may befall him, will act as he ought in all Emergencies, with Uprightness and Alacrity, with Courage and Honour; will suffer with a composed

posed and even Temper; will thus give Testimony to the Efficacy of Religion, and vindicate the Dispensations of Providence to Mankind. Nor can it fail, but so dutiful a Subject to the King of all, so faithful a Confessor, so ready a Martyr, if Need be, in his Cause, will obtain from him the strongest Consolation here, and the amplest Recompence hereafter. Therefore, let us pray earnestly for this blessed Disposition, and improve ourselves in it by continual Exercises of rational Devotion: stir up our Faith and our Love, when they languish; recover *our Steps*, whenever they *had well-nigh slipped*^e: *put our Trust in the Lord, and be doing Good: delight in him, and he shall give us our Heart's Desire: commit our Way unto him, and he shall bring it to pass; bring forth our Righteousness as the Light, and our Judgement as the Noon-day*^f.

^e Pf. lxxiii. 2.^f Pf. xxxvii. 3—6.

S E R M O N XII.

EPH. v. 20.

*Giving Thanks always for all Things unto God
and the Father, in the Name of our Lord
Jesus Christ.*

I HAVE endeavoured, in three Discourses, to instruct you in the Duties of Patience, Contentment and Resignation : each rising higher than the other in the Scale of right Disposition, and advancing further from mere Virtue into the superior Region of Piety. Happy, in Comparison of others, are such as possess these Attainments in any good Degree : but even they have another Step to take ; for *yet shew I unto you a more excellent Way*^a. It is not sufficient, that we bear Sufferings of every Kind with all the Composure, which our Nature admits ; that we reflect on the various

^a Cor. xii. 31.

Disadvantages of our respective Conditions without repining; that we yield ourselves up to the just and wise Disposal of the sovereign Lord of the Universe: we are bound also to feel Gratitude and express Thankfulness to our heavenly Father continually for whatever in the Course of his Providence befalls us; and this we are to perform, as Disciples of his blessed Son our Saviour. Let us consider distinctly the several Parts of this most sublime Precept: for certainly higher we cannot go.

I. We are to *give Thanks always to God.*

II. We are to do it *for all Things.*

III. We are to do it *in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

I. We are to give Thanks always to God and the Father.

The different Orders of sensible Beings were created every one for such a Degree of Happiness, as God saw to be most for the Good of the Whole: and rational Beings were created to confess and celebrate his Bounty to themselves and the rest of the World. Giving Glory is the due Return for having experienced Goodness. It is therefore necessarily expected from us by him, who *hath made all Things for himself;*

himself^b; and must require them to answer the End, for which they were formed. We are sensible it is extremely wrong and unworthy, when we fail of owning the Favours, which we receive from each other. And what shocking Baseness is it then to forget his Liberality, who hath *given us Life and Breath, and all Things richly to enjoy*^c! For how inconsiderable is whatever any one of us can do for the Person whom he loves best, compared to what God hath done for us all! Our very Capacity of receiving Pleasure from our Fellow-creatures proceeds from our Creator, as well as every other Source of Joy, which we feel to spring up within ourselves. And we feel much less of both, than we might and ought. We are so taken up and disquieted, with imaginary or small Misfortunes, with Uneasinesses and Pains for the most Part very supportable, with groundless or excessive Discontents and Resentments, with needless Pursuits, and immoderate Hopes and Fears, that we suffer Multitudes of Satisfaction, which Providence brings perpetually in our Way, to pass by us unperceived or unnoticed. Yet many of them we should find to be great Blessings; for we

^b Prov. xvi. 4.^c Acts xvii. 25. 1 Tim. vi. 17.

frequently overlook the very greatest that we have: the Means granted us by Reason and Scripture, situated as we are in a Land of Light and Liberty, of improving in religious Knowledge, in Rightness of Heart and Goodness of Life; the Delights of social, and in particular of domestic Friendliness; the continual Feasts, which mere Health and Strength afford, if they are enjoyed with cautious Innocence, prudent Activity, and a chearful Equality of Temper. Inconsiderately throwing away, or supinely disregarding, such bountiful Provisions for our well-being, is surely the most dreadful Waste, of which we can be guilty. But even the lower Benefits, Entertainments, and Amusements of Life, even those of them in which all Persons may share, such as the very opening of our Eyes and looking around, such as the Use of every one of our Senses, may give us, though singly but little Matters, yet being incessantly within our Reach, arise on the Whole to a vast Amount. We do receive a great deal of Pleasure from them: and we might receive much more, if we would frame our Minds to observe and be pleased with the several Objects and Occurrences,

currences, that present themselves to us almost every Moment.

But unhappily even they, who imagine they are the most judiciously attentive to enjoy from what they like, or from every Thing about them, all that they can, are very apt to consider but few Things, if any, as Matter of Thankfulness to God. Yet evidently Nothing, which we have Cause to think in any Degree good, ought to escape being considered in this View. For he is the sole original Fountain of Good, of every Sort of Good: not only *the Father of Mercies, and God of all Comfort*^d, with Respect to our higher Expectations; but the *Giver of Rain and fruitful Seasons, filling our Hearts with Food and Gladness*^e; who *openeth his Hand, and satisfieth the Desire*, the very lowest Desire, of *every living Thing*^f. Now would we but reflect on our various Enjoyments in this Light; as Marks and Instances of the Good-will and Kindness of the great Lord of all; as Presents, which he graciously condescends to make us; it would raise the Worth and Dignity of them inexpressibly; it would impress us with the strongest Conviction of their Guilt, who *when they know*

^d 2 Cor. i. 3.^e Acts xiv. 17.^f Ps. cxlv. 16.

God, glorify him not as God, neither are thankful § ; it would inspire us with a most pleasing Love and Reverence to him, preserve us very powerfully from sinning against him by the Abuse of his own Gifts ; and support us under whatever we might suffer in this World, by the Assurance that he, of whose Bounty we have so large Experience here, hath Blessings infinitely superior in Store for us hereafter.

Let us therefore stir up and cherish in our Breasts, a Habit of constant Thankfulness to Heaven : bear always in our Thoughts the Value of those Faculties and Powers of Body and Mind with which we are endowed, of the Health and Ease which we enjoy or have enjoyed, and remember that *He it is who made us, and not we ourselves* ^h. Let us reckon over the manifold Comforts and Accommodations of Life, the Relations and Friends, the agreeable Acquaintance, the fair Esteem, of which we are possessed, and consider that all these are the Donations of a kind Providence. Let us raise our Views higher : contemplate the inestimable Benefits of our Redemption ; of the Precepts, the Examples, the Promises of holy Writ ;

§ Rom. i. 21.

^h Ps. c. 2.

the Instructions given us by God's Ministers in public, by good Persons and good Books in private; the Freedom, which we and all around us have of worshipping our Maker, according to our Consciences. Let us recollect, at the same Time, the Security of our Persons and Properties from Oppression in all other Respects, as well as this: that the whole Exercise of civil Authority over us, is legal and mild; that no one *will* or can *harm* us, *if we are Followers of that which is good*¹. Let us compare our own Condition in these Particulars, with that of the Multitudes elsewhere, indeed of most Men throughout the Earth, who sit in Darkness and Bondage, temporal, and spiritual. Yet even they have Cause to praise God. For the most deficient in worldly Advantages have many Consolations, if they will attend to them properly: the most ignorant shall be accountable only in Proportion to their Means of Knowledge; and the most faulty shall be judged with every due Allowance to the Propensities of their Nature, and the Prejudices of their Education. But how much more liberal is our Share of

¹ 1 Pet. iii. 13.

whatever *pertains unto Life and Godliness*^k : and what Pleasure should we take in paying suitable Acknowledgements^l *Blessed are they that dwell in thy House : they will be alway praising thee*^l.

But besides being thankful to God *alway*, we ought,

II. To be thankful to him *for all Things*.

That the Gift of Life, taking the Whole of it together, is justly a Ground of Thanksgiving, we cannot question, without questioning also the Goodness of the Giver. Yet whether we are indeed thankful, and to what Degree, for the Sum total of it united, we should do well to examine ourselves. But the Apostle expressly enjoins us to be so for each Part separately. Be it ever so afflictive, we have deserved much worse : and therefore ought to bless our merciful Father, that the Blow came no sooner, that it was no heavier, that it was repeated no oftener. But then, besides, the same Apostle hath told us, *that all Things work together for Good to them who love God*^m. We are extremely prone to think otherwise, when any unpleasing Occurrence

^k 2 Pet. i. 3.

^l Ps. lxxxiv. 4.

^m Rom. viii. 28.

befalls us; and to say with good old *Jacob*, *All these Things are against me*ⁿ. But as he found most unexpectedly, that the Grievances, which he bemoaned, were the very Instruments of his Happiness throughout the Remainder of his Days: so have very many since, and so very possibly may we, experience the like unforeseen Connection. I have shewn you, in speaking on the Subjects related to this, from what Evils our Sufferings or Disadvantages often preserve us, what Benefits they often procure us. Indeed we frequently acknowledge, that to such or such a Misfortune or Disappointment we are indebted for our Escape from destructive Dangers, or our Attainment of most desirable Blessings. But we might discern many more Events of this Nature, would we look for them: and we should believe there are such very commonly, when we cannot see them. It is an Act of Duty owing to him, whose Power and Wisdom can easily bring Good out of Evil: and an Act of Prudence, which we owe to ourselves, as the sure Way of turning every gloomy Appearance into a cheerful one.

ⁿ Gen. xlii. 36.

And were our Troubles and Crosses never to end in augmenting our temporal Welfare, yet they may and will, if it be not our own Fault, contribute to a far greater Felicity, our moral and spiritual Improvement. Sometimes we cannot avoid perceiving their medicinal and salutary Tendency: often we might perceive it by the Help of a little serious Consideration: and they may be extremely requisite, when at the Time we perceive it not. For both our outward Dangers and our inward Weaknesses are very commonly unseen by us: whence we imagine ourselves to be in perfect Safety, while we are really in imminent Hazard. But the great Physician of our Souls knows our true and whole State: and it is unspeakable Goodness in him, to apply the Remedies, be they ever so rough, which our Case demands and a due Regimen observed on our Part will render effectual. When a needful, but harsh Operation is prescribed to be performed on us by one of our Fellow-creatures, though we are sensible we must feel from it exquisite Pain, yet we chuse to undergo it, we desire to have it completely gone through without sparing us; and even during the Smart,

Smart, we bless the skilful Hand, that inflicts the 'Wound. Surely then we should bear as willingly, at least, the *Chastenings of the Lord*, and *neither faint nor murmur when we are rebuked of him. For whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth; and scourgeth every Son, whom he receiveth*".

The worldly Advantages, that we have wished for in vain, might not only have failed to produce in us a due Sense of Gratitude towards God, which alone would have been heinous Guilt, but might have tempted us to Irregularities, to Pride, to injurious Behaviour, to a ruinous Choice of the good Things of this Life for our Portion: whereas the Uneasinesses and Sorrows, that we groan under, may secure us from vicious Courses, may teach us Humility and Compassion, may raise our Affections above earthly Objects. *Before I was afflicted, saith the Psalmist, I went astray: but now have I kept thy Word. It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy Statutes*^a. *No Chastening for the present, saith the Apostle, seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless, afterwards, it*

^a Heb. xii. 5, 6.^p Ps. cxix. 67, 71.

yieldeth the peaceable Fruits of Righteousness unto them, which are exercised thereby ⁹. If Men be holden in Cords of Affliction, saith Elibu in Job, then God sheweth them their Work, and their Transgressions, that they have exceeded: he openeth their Ear to Discipline; and commandeth, that they return from Iniquity. If they obey and serve him, they shall spend their Days in Prosperity, and their Years in Pleasure ^r.

Whatever makes us better, will ordinarily make us happier even now. For our Faults and Follies are what usually bring on our Troubles: and in that Case Amendment is the likeliest Way to remove them, and prevent more. Or suppose it proves otherwise, mere Consciousness of Amendment will administer no small Consolation. And as there is very commonly pitiable Wretchedness hid under shewish Prosperity, so there may be sweet Tranquillity of Mind under sore Calamities. *In the Multitude of the Sorrows, that I had in my Heart, thy Comforts have refreshed my Soul* ^s. Innocence gives great Joy in the Midst of Sufferings: why may not Piety, superadded to Innocence or to Penitence, give

⁹ Heb. xii. 11.^r Job xxxvi. 8—11.^s Ps. xciv. 19.
greater?

greater? Few, alas, are qualified for such Feelings; and therefore the Mention of them may seem strange: but as they are perfectly rational, we may justly, on the Authority of Scripture, believe God to excite and strengthen them in devout Minds to such a Degree, as to make them abundantly an Over-balance to the heaviest Pressures of this Life. Or if they be not, the Christian Temper, formed and cultivated within us by the Means of these Pressures, will fit us for higher Rewards in the Life to come. So that indeed the Burthens, which our Maker lays upon us, are intended by him, who *knoweth* our *Frame*, and *whereof we are made*¹, as a requisite Preparation for our truest Good: *that we may be strengthened with all Might, according to his glorious Power, unto Patience and long Suffering with Joyfulness; and give Thanks unto the Father, who maketh us meet to be Partakers of the Inheritance of the Saints in Light*². Were we but influenced by this Consideration as we ought, we should say to God with pleasing Wonder, what *Job* saith by Way of discontented Expostulation. *What is Man, that thou shouldest magnify him* thus; *that thou*

¹ Ps. ciii. 14.² Col. i. 11, 12.

shouldest set thine Heart upon him; that thou shouldest visit him every Morning, and try him every Moment^w?

But supposing the Trials we undergo, should not improve our Virtues at all, yet they must be deemed a very severe Exercise of them: and even were such Exercise to impair some of them a little; provided it be not through undutiful Misbehaviour under them, but merely from Weakness, contrary to our Wills and best Endeavours, undoubtedly every single Circumstance of our Case will be equitably considered in our Favour. It is true, our most laborious Service hath no Merit in it: but through the unmerited Goodness of God, if we *endure Hardness as good Soldiers of Jesus Christ^x*, we shall be plentifully recompensed by *the Captain of our Salvation^y*. For, as St. Paul triumphantly expresses it, *All Things are for our Sakes*, every Dispensation of Providence is designed to increase our future Blessedness, *that the abundant Grace may, through the Thanksgiving of many, redound to the Glory of God. For our light Affliction, which is but for a Moment, worketh for us a far more ex-*

^w Job vii. 17, 18.

^x 2 Tim. ii. 3.

^y Heb. ii. 10.

*ceeding and eternal Weight of Glory*². Therefore let us, like him, as well as we can, *rejoice in Tribulations: knowing that Tribulation worketh Patience; and Patience, Experience; and Experience, Hope; and Hope maketh not ashamed*³.

Still we are by no Means to run, either wilfully or carelessly, into unnecessary Troubles; or expose ourselves by Indolence and Neglect to unnecessary Losses, Failures, and Disappointments: for under such we have no Promise that Heaven will support us, or make us the least Compensation for them. But when the Hand of Providence brings them on, *God is faithful, who will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able*⁴: and since he will also reward us for bearing what he strengthens us to bear, well may we *count it all Joy, when led by him, we fall into divers Temptations*⁵.

Joy of this Kind indeed, will unavoidably be mixed, in our weak Natures, with an Allay of Uneasiness, and probably no small one. But be it ever so great, were it enough to extinguish for the present all Feeling of Pleasure and Thankfulness intirely; yet we may

² 2 Cor. iv. 15, 17.
^c James i. 2.

^a Rom. v. 2—5.

^b 1 Cor. x. 13.

certainly reflect, that we have Cause to be pleased and thankful, if we could. And this alone will make our worst Sufferings much more tolerable, than if we were to consider them as so much Evil without any Thing to counterbalance it. Besides, by looking on every Thing in so animating a View, Appearances will gradually change for the better, the Vigour of our Minds will augment, and we shall come to smile at Events, that formerly would have terrified and overwhelmed us. But this is wholly on Supposition, that, with our heartiest Efforts, we join our most earnest Prayers for *Grace to help in Time of Need*^d. The Attacks upon us are often sudden, violent, and long : our own Abilities, we have had but too much Proof, are inconsiderable ; and apt to fail us the most, when we depend on them with the fullest Confidence. But the divine Assistance can enable us to do every Thing : and, though our Beginnings be feeble, yet, if we sincerely trust in God, and faithfully exert the Powers he will give us, *out of Weakness we shall be made strong*^e, and not only *run with Patience the Race that is set before us*^f, but *greatly rejoice that now for a*

^d Heb. iv. 16.^e Heb. xi. 34.^f Heb. xii. 1.

Season, if Need be, we are in Heaviness through manifold Temptations ; well knowing the gracious Intention of our heavenly Father to be this, that the Trial of our Faith may be found unto Praise, and Honour, and Glory, at the Appearing of Jesus Christ^s.

Let us therefore seriously and often recollect not only the monstrous Ingratitude of repining, and the very blameable Unreasonableness of Despondency, but the strong Obligation of being as thankful for all Things, as the Infirmary of our Nature will permit. Indeed merely using pious Words of Thankfulness for Afflictions, insincerely, without any correspondent Sense of what we utter, would be an Affectation, disgustful to Men, and provoking to God. But forming our Hearts, in the Degree that we are able, to the real Spirit of it, is one of the noblest Exercises of inward Devotion. As we are imperfect in every Duty, we shall in all Likelihood be more peculiarly imperfect in so exalted and difficult a one : and we should not be dejected on finding that we are. But neither should we ever cease either praying or endeavouring to attain,

^s 1 Pet. i. 6, 7.

what is in Truth a valuable Part of the Temper of Heaven. When we come thither, we shall clearly perceive the Usefulness of our most exquisite Sufferings here, and praise God for them to Eternity; therefore let us be persuaded of their Usefulness in the mean Time, and begin to praise him for them now.

But these and all our Praises the Apostle directs us,

III. To offer up *in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ*.

By him, as the Scripture expressly teaches, *God made the Worlds^b: by him were all Things created, that are in Heaven and that are in Earth, visible and invisible: all Things were created by him and for him, and by him all Things consistⁱ*. Therefore in every Act of Worship, his Name is to be joined with that of the Father Almighty. By him have the various Dispensations of Providence been administered from the Beginning: and particularly that most important one of the Restoration of fallen and corrupted Man, *through the tender Mercy of our God^k, who hath delivered us from the Power of Darkness, and hath translated us into the Kingdom of his dear Son; in*

^b Heb. i. 2,

ⁱ Col. i. 16, 17.

^k Luke i. 78.

*whom we have Redemption through his Blood, even the Forgiveness of our Sins*¹. Therefore, all our Thanksgivings ought to commemorate the Source of all our Blessings. *Honour, and Glory, and Power, be unto him that sitteth upon the Throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever. For thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God through thy Blood, out of every Kindred, and Tongue, and People, and Nation*^m. By him also, was the Knowledge of their Duty and Hopes revealed to Mankind : by him *the Day-spring from on high visited us to give Light to them that sat in Darkness and in the Shadow of Death, and guide our Feet into the Way of Peace*ⁿ. Through *the Spirit of Christ, which was in them*^o, the Prophets of the Old Testament directed and cheered the earlier Ages : his own personal Instructions much more abundantly enlightened the Apostles : and the Succession of Teachers, which he appointed, hath conveyed the glad Tidings of his Gospel down to us, and will to the World's End. *Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable Gift*^p.

Reasoning had bewildered Men in Multi-

¹ Col. i. 13, 14.

^o 1 Pet. x. 11.

^m Rev. v. 13, 9.

^p 2 Cor. ix. 15.

ⁿ Luke i. 78, 79.

tudes of Errors, and led them into very little Truth. It could not lead them into any Certainty of those Truths, which were of the greatest Importance to Sinners : Pardon, Grace, and eternal Happiness. It could not assure us of that comfortable Doctrine of the Text, that we have Cause to thank God for every Thing which befalls us. For how should the wisest of Men attain, by the mere Exercise of his own Faculties, to know, whether it be possible in the Nature of Things, and fit upon the Whole, for the Supreme Being to order all Events in such a Manner, as that every one of them shall be for the Benefit of every good Person ? We may wish this indeed ; we may hope it ; and it is the most glorious Hope, that we are capable of : but a Ground of firm Reliance can be only from the gracious Declarations of our blessed Lord, or his authorized Servants : and we are strictly bound to ask and receive this and every Bounty from above, as Believers in him. Justly then doth St. Paul direct us : *Whatsoever ye do, in Word or Deed, do all in the Name of the Lord Jesus, giving Thanks to God and the Father by him*^a. And again : *In every Thing give Thanks : for this*

^a Col. iii, 17.

this is the Will of God in Jesus Christ concerning you *. Suitably to which Precepts, St. Peter represents it as the great End of our whole Behaviour *that God may be glorified in all Things through Jesus Christ* *. By him therefore, as the Epistle to the Hebrews exhorts, *let us offer the Sacrifice of Praise to God continually, giving Thanks to his Name* *. His merciful Purpose in what he hath done for us, and what he hath taught us, is that we may be happy, not only hereafter but even here. *These Things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye might have Peace. In the World ye shall have Tribulation: but be of good Cheer; I have overcome the World* *. He underwent on our Account the most dreadful of all Afflictions, for this Reason amongst others, *to leave us an Example, that we should follow his Steps* *, and look unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our Faith, that we may not be wearied and faint in our Minds *; but rejoice in as much as we are Partakers of Christ's Sufferings, that when his Glory shall be revealed, we may be glad with exceeding Joy †.

* 1 Thess. v. 18.

† John xvi. 33.

‡ 1 Pet. iv. 13.

* 1 Pet. iv. 11.

† 1 Pet. ii. 21.

* Heb. xiii. 15.

* Heb. xii. 2, 3.

And now, were but all, who profess Christianity, careful to qualify themselves for looking on the various Occurrences of Life, whether prosperous or adverse, as Tokens of God's kind Purposes towards them for the Sake of his dear Son, and conscientious in paying him sincerely suitable Acknowledgements: how void would they be of Resentment to each other; how full of Pity to such as would injure them, knowing that they can only hurt themselves: what a pleasing Security against Fear and Disappointment, what *strong Consolation* ^a under Sorrow and Pain, what a powerful Support under all the Decays of Body or Mind, would they enjoy: how delightful would be their Intercourse with Heaven, consisting almost wholly in Acts of Gratitude and Praise: how blissful a Sense of God's Love to them must they feel continually increasing; and how irresistible a Recommendation of *the Doctrine of God our Saviour* ^a must these admirable Fruits of it exhibit to all Mankind! Very different is the present State of Things. But to every one, who steadily practises this Duty, the Benefits of it are just the same, as if it were practised universally. All outward Mo-

^a Heb. vi. 18.^a Tit. ii. 10.

lestations, instead of destroying his inward Peace, contribute, he knows, to promote his true Welfare. And though he is tenderly grieved for the Guilt, and the Misery present and future, of the incorrigibly bad, while they applaud themselves, and despise or hate him, yet his Concern is tempered with that placid Acquiescence in the most awful Parts of God's Will, which the Redeemer, though *he wept over Jerusalem^b*, felt when he said: *I thank thee, O Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth, that thou hast hid these Things from the wise and prudent, meaning in their own Imaginations, and hast revealed them unto Babes, Persons of an humble Simplicity of Heart: Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy Sight^c*. Yet, though cordially reconciled to every Thing which he sees and expects, the good Christian pleases himself peculiarly with the Prospect of that promised Time, when on this Earth *all the People shall be righteous^d*: but inexpressibly more with the Assurance of a blessed Eternity, in which all who are accounted worthy to partake shall at length magnify the Judge of the World, with unmixed Delight, for every

^b Luke xix. 41.^c Matth. xi. 25, 26. Luke x. 21.^d II. lx. 21.

Thing they have suffered, as well as every Thing they have enjoyed ; *and sing the Song of Moses the Servant of God, and the Song of the Lamb*, the final Result of all the divine Revelations, recorded from the first, *saying : Great and marvellous are thy Works, Lord God Almighty : just and true are thy Ways, thou King of Saints. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy Name ? For thou only art holy,—thy Judgements are made manifest^e.*

Rev. xv. 3, 4.

S E R M O N XIII.

PSALM CXXviii. 5, 6.

The Lord shall bless thee out of Zion, and thou shalt see the Good of Jerusalem all the Days of thy Life.

Yea, thou shalt see thy Childrens Children, and Peace upon Israel.

THE Subject of this Psalm is declared in the first Verse. *Blessed is every one, that feareth the Lord, that walketh in his Ways. For Godliness is profitable unto all Things, having Promise of the Life that now is, and of that which is to come*^a. The present Happiness attending it was indeed somewhat more visible, while there was more Need it should, in those earlier Times, when the future Rewards of it were less clearly discovered. But in every

^a 1 Tim. iv. 8.

succeeding Age also, the Practice of Religion and Virtue hath appeared, to all prudent Inquirers, the likeliest and surest Way to avoid the Miseries of Life, and secure the Enjoyments of it. The first Advantage, which the Psalmist promises to the *pioue*, comprehends in general Health and Success in their Affairs. *For thou shalt eat the Labour of thine Hands : happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee.* The next is a particular Blessing of the nearest Concern ; the Possession of domestic and conjugal Felicity, in the Midst of a large and well ordered Family. *Thy Wife shall be as a fruitful Vine by the Sides of thine House : thy Children like Olive Plants round about thy Table.* For such Plants would soon afford both an agreeable Shelter to those who feast under them in the open Air, as the Eastern Manner was, and a considerable Profit to the Owners of them. Delight, Security, and Plenty at Home, being usually the principal Objects of Desire, the Psalmist lays an emphatical Stress on them, by adding, *Behold, thus shall the Man be blessed, that feareth the Lord.* But still, as good Persons can never thoroughly relish their own private Welfare, if the Community suffers at the same Time, or Calamities are likely to befall

befall it soon, an Assurance is given them in the last Place, that their exemplary Obedience to the Laws of God will, through his Mercy, contribute to their being Witnesses of the Prosperity, both of their Country and their Descendants during a long Course of Years : *The Lord shall bless thee out of Zion, and thou shalt see the Good of Jerusalem all the Days of thy Life. Yea, thou shalt see thy Childrens Children, and Peace upon Israel*: in which concluding Part of this most pleasing View even of the present Condition of religious and virtuous Persons, we have it signified to us,

- I. That a large Portion of their Happiness consists in the flourishing State of their Country.
 - II. That this Happiness is greatly increased by a Prospect, that their own Posterity will continue to flourish with it.
 - III. That both these Things depend on, and are to be expected from, the divine Benediction.
- I. That a large Portion of their Happiness consists in the flourishing State of their Country. Every Thing hath an Influence on our En-
- VOL. V. T joyments,

joyments, in Proportion to the Share which it hath in our Affections. And Affection to the Public never fails to be remarkably strong in worthy Breasts. The complete Character indeed of social Virtue, if considered in Theory, is good Will towards all Men. And no Concern for a Part deserves Praise, if it be inconsistent with Benevolence to the Whole. But the Whole, even of this Earth, is an Object so vast, that few, if any, can preserve in their Minds a fixed Regard to it, or entertain the smallest Hope of doing it Service. Therefore Mankind is advantageously divided into many particular Societies. And a Zeal in the Members of each for the Benefit of their own deserves, not only to be encouraged as a most useful Quality, but honoured, as a most laudable one. It shews a Rightness and Greatness of Mind, capable of being affected by a common Interest: it shews the most amiable of Virtues, Love, towards a large Part of our Fellow-creatures, and implies Nothing contrary towards the rest. For the real Good of every People in the World is compatible with the real Good of every other. To rule and to oppress is no Good to any: and Peace and Liberty and friendly Intercourse for mutual Convenience

venience all the Nations of the Earth may enjoy at once. The Happiness of Individuals, (we experience it) depends, not on rising above others, but on being easy and well within themselves, and reasonably secure of continuing so. In like Manner the Happiness of Kingdoms and States depends, not on extended Dominion or Superfluity of Wealth, (whence often proceeds every Kind of Evil) but on inward good Order and outward Safety. These Things we may and must rejoice to see our Country possess: and these are the only Things, which the Love of it requires us to have at Heart.

This Virtue indeed, as well as others, hath been frequently misunderstood: and false Appearances of it unhappily pursued. Yet even then so much Rightness of Intention towards their own Community was mixed in the Minds of Men with wrong Behaviour towards the Nations round them, that their Injustice, though monstrous, hath been always considered with Indulgence, nay often admired as Heroism. And the only People, too severely censured on this Head, hath been the Jewish: whose very Law some have charged with teaching ill Will to the rest of the World, though it hath

more Precepts of Compassion and Tenderneſs towards them, than perhaps any other. They were indeed commanded to ſet out with extirpating the *Canaanites*, and planting themſelves in their Land. But well might Heaven decree, after a Forbearance of ſeveral Ages, the Deſtruction of theſe Wretches, abandoned at once to the moſt unnatural Luſts, and the moſt ſhocking Barbarities; and (which made their Recovery hopeleſs) both of them practiſed, as Acts of their Religion. Nor could the Jews be more ſtrongly warned againſt committing ſuch Enormities, than by being appointed to puniſh them; as God may certainly puniſh, either by his own Hand, or by whom he will. But with all Mankind ever after, they were to live in Peace: only avoiding Intimacies likely to corrupt them, and extinguiſh that Profeſſion of Faith in the one true God, which they were deſigned to preſerve for the general Benefit. Accordingly they were, when free, as good Neighbours, and when conquered, as good Subjects, as other Men; till heathen Perſecution provoked them to hate even thoſe Heathens, who were no Perſecutors: and then it was Time for our Saviour to teach them, not the Love of their Country,

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(for of that, such as it was, they had too much) but the universal Love of all Men : a Doctrine equally needful, though on different Accounts, for the *Romans* also. Yet he, and his great Apostle St. *Paul*, were shining Examples of most affectionate Concern for their Brethren of the House of *Israel*, even while they received the cruellest Treatment from them. And, though the first Disciples were chiefly private Persons, under one absolute Dominion, and that, of unbelieving Magistrates, and consequently no other political Injunctions, than those of dutiful Obedience and uniformly moral Behaviour, could with Propriety be laid upon them ; yet these are inculcated with such Diligence, and grounded on such Principles in the New Testament, that as ample a Provision is made by them for the public Welfare as then was feasible : and whoever will seriously consider the Gospel Rules, will be far from asserting, with a late Author ^b, that the Love of his Country is a Virtue purely voluntary in a Christian.

If the Love of all Men be required by our Religion, the Love of those, whom we are most able to serve, must be understood as pe-

^b Lord Shaftesbury.

cularly required. If we are to feel for Strangers and Enemies, we cannot but feel more strongly for those, to whom Acquaintance and Neighbourhood, Relation and Friendship, common Laws and common Interests, unite us. It was never from the Extensiveness of their Benevolence, but the Narrowness of it, that Men have made the Public suffer : and therefore the truer Christian any one is, the truer Patriot he will ever be. And especially if the Equity of the civil Constitution, under which he lives, remarkably secures whatever is valuable to Men at present ; and the Purity of the Doctrines publicly taught, leads them the safest Way to eternal Bliss hereafter ; he will rejoice and be thankful from the Bottom of his Soul, that *the Lot is fallen unto him in so fair a Ground*^c : where he can *sing of Mercy and Judgement*^d, and *go with the Multitude to the House of God, with the Voice of Joy and Praise*^e.

But, though every pious Person will always consider the Happiness of his Country, as a very interesting Part of his own, yet the Degree in which he will consider it so, must greatly depend on the Relation to it, in which

^c Ps. xvi. 6.^d Ps. ci. 1.^e Ps. xliii. 4.

he stands. ~~And~~ therefore they who are distinguished by the more important Relations, whose Office and Business consists in being *the Ministers of God for Good^c*, to Numbers, to Nations of their Fellow-creatures at once, they must have exalted Satisfaction in seeing *the Pleasure of the Lord prosper in their Hands^d*. Every Instance of national Felicity must warm their Breasts with singular Consolation : above all, when they are conscious of its arising from their own Rightness of Mind, and Vigilance of Conduct : when they know they have deserved from the People under them that excellent Character of *David: He fed them with a faithful and true Heart, and ruled them prudently with all his Power^e*.

II. The next Thing to be learnt from the Text is, that the Happiness, accruing to good Men from the flourishing State of their Country, is greatly increased by the Prospect, that their own Posterity will continue to flourish with it.

The Desire of exerting our tenderest Affections, which are the conjugal and parental, and leaving Representatives of ourselves behind

^c Rom. xiii. 4.

^d Is. liii. 10.

^e Ps. lxxviii. 73.

us, to preserve our Name, ~~in~~ our Substance, and carry on the Designs of Providence on Earth, is deeply rooted in our Frame: it hath always influenced the Conduct of Men, in Proportion as they have lived agreeably to the Simplicity of Nature: and they who have thought the absolute Restraint of this Inclination the Way to higher Degrees of Purity and spiritual Perfection, have entertained a Notion as evidently wrong, as the divine Constitution of Things is right. But though such Imaginations are groundless, preclude the Exercise of many Virtues, and weaken human Society: yet the Indulgence of irregular Liberties, however favourably their own or common Practice may induce Persons to think of them, produces Effects far more hurtful: overturns all good Order, destroys the Peace of Families, introduces endless Confusions and Distresses, causes most afflicting Breaches of Faith, tempts to most execrable Barbarities, effaces gradually all moral Principles, and begets more Crimes and Sorrows, than almost any one Sin besides. The sacred Institution of Marriage therefore is of the utmost Importance to the Innocence and the Happiness of Mankind. They who avoid it, as engaging them in Cares
and

and Troubles, distrust the Goodness of God, who hath made every Article of proper Behaviour, on the Whole, our present Interest: and they who discourage it, as many do grievously, though not professedly, by running into needless Expences and Refinements, pervert, for the Sake of Vanities and Follies, the plain Way, which Heaven hath marked out for public Strength and private Comfort.

Marriage lays the Ground-work of all those Kindreds and Affinities, which unite us together, by so many engaging Ties; and from which proceed such numerous relative Duties, equally beneficial and delightful. Marriage allots to the several Members of the Society, distinct Parts of it for Objects of their peculiar Concern: and their Affection to these animates their Zeal for the Welfare of the Whole. Their Country seems nearer akin to them, for having Persons, whom they love as themselves, interested in what befalls it: they study its future Prosperity from their Attachment to those whom they shall leave behind them; and triumph beforehand in the Prospect of Happiness to their Descendants, when they shall

shall be no more. Indolence and Selfishness would incline Men, still much more powerfully than they do, to Behaviour of pernicious Consequence on many Occasions, were they influenced by personal Considerations only : but Regard to their Posterity enlarges their Views, gives them a Sympathy with distant Times, and excites them to prefer without Hesitation and with Pleasure, the lasting Benefit of others, though remote, to the greatest and dearest of their own short-lived Advantages and Gratifications.

Now if a Likelihood, merely that their Offspring shall partake in the general Felicity, is able to fill the Minds of Men with such Emotions ; what transporting Reflections must they have, whose Descendants appear destined by the Stations of their Parents to be Authors of that Felicity in their Turn and Degree ! How strongly must such a Hope induce them to secure by good Example and Instruction this highest Honour and Blessedness to such as are to inherit their Dignities ! And how warm a Return of most affectionate Gratitude will they merit and receive from Mankind, if Virtue and Liberty shall not only be supported

ported by them in the present Age, but transmitted to succeeding ones, by their pious Care of forming their Progeny to the Knowledge and the Love of public Good ! The Prospect only of *Childrens Children* would have little Joy in it, without that of *Peace upon Israel*: without a reasonable Expectation of their contributing to the true Glory of the Family, from which they spring, and the true Happiness of the Nation, over which they are to preside. But when due Provision is made for this, both Sovereign and People may take up the Words of the Psalmist: *Like as the Arrows in the Hand of the Giant, even so are the young Children. Happy is the Man that bath his Quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, when they speak with their Enemies in the Gate*¹.

But then, as ever we hope to see either our public or our private Happiness continue, we must be careful to remember,

III. That both depend on the Divine Benediction.

Except the Lord build the House, their Labour is but lost that build it: except the Lord

¹ Ps. cxxvii. 5, 6.

keep the City; the Watchman waketh but in vain.—Children, and the Fruit of the Womb, are an Heritage and Gift that cometh of the Lord.* These are the express Declarations of holy Writ : and both Reason and Experience humbly subscribe to them. It is not indeed possible for us in many Cases to discern particularly in what Manner the Providence of God conducts Things : but we may plainly discern in general; that as the whole Course of Nature is nothing else than the free Appointment, which he hath been pleased to make ; as the Motions of the inanimate World proceed from those which he originally impressed upon it ; and all the Thoughts and Actions of intelligent Beings are doubtless absolutely subject to the Influence of their Maker ; (since we see they are greatly subject, and often when they perceive it not, to that of their Fellow-creatures ;) it must be in his Power by various Ways, perhaps the more effectual for being unknown, to dispose of every Thing so, as may best answer his wise Purposes of Mercy or Correction. And as he evidently can do this, it is likewise evidently worthy of him to

* Pf. cxxvii. 1, 2, 4.

do it; for the highest of his Titles is that of the moral Governor of the Universe: and therefore, we may firmly believe the Scripture assuring us, that he doth it in Fact; that he makes *all Things work together for Good to them that love him*¹, and *curses the very Blessings*^m of those who love him not.

Whenever then we find our Affairs going on to our Content, our Families flourishing, our Healths constant, our Hearts full of Exultation, and dictating Language to us like that of *David, In my Prosperity I said, I shall never be removed*; let us be sure also like him to add, *Thou, Lord, of thy Goodness hadst made my Hill so strong*ⁿ. In the Hand of God it is, whether we shall have the Things that we wish for; whether, when we have them, they shall prove Comforts or Afflictions, the Joy or the Grief of our Souls; whether lastly, if they are ever so dear to us, they shall remain with us, or be snatched from us: and therefore, it unspeakably concerns us all to interest Providence in our Behalf. They whom God favours most, are by no Means exempt from Sufferings: but he not only will always make religious Persons full Amends hereafter, but

¹ Rom. viii. 28.^m Mal. ii. 2.ⁿ Ps. xxx. 6.

ordinarily grant them Deliverance and Consolation here. Thus the Psalmist, immediately after his above-mentioned Triumph, had Cause to subjoin, *Thou didst turn thy Face from me, and I was troubled*^o. But it follows, *Then cried I unto thee, and gat me to my Lord right humbly*^p. *Thou turnedst my Heaviness into Joy: thou hast put off my Sackcloth, and girded me with Gladness*^q. Nor was this a singular Mercy to him, or confined to the more worldly Jewish Dispensation: but our blessed Redeemer hath given a general Promise to his Disciples, that they, who *seek first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness*, shall have *all Things needful added unto them*^r; and shall, even when molested *with Persecutions*, receive *now in this Time an hundred Fold* of what they undergo, as well as *in the World to come eternal Life*^s.

Persecutions indeed, more or less, the Apostle hath told us, *all shall suffer, that will live godly in Christ*^t: and partly on that very Account. But in these, they shall be enabled *to take Pleasure*^u, even when they are the heaviest:

^o Ver. 7.^p Matth. vi. 33.^q 2 Cor. xii. 10.^p Ver. 8.^r Mark x. 30.^s Ver. 12.^t 2 Tim. iii. 12.

and usually they are very light, compared with the Calamities, which the wicked bring on their own Heads. The natural Tendency of Christian Virtues is to Happiness ; of Sin, to Misery : God hath appointed this Tendency, and he will make it effectual. If Nations, in the Midst of their Wealth and Tranquillity, will not shew they are sensible, that he bestows them, he will justly prove it by taking them away. And if those Persons, whom he hath raised to superior Honours, and favoured with Marks of distinguished Goodness, will ungratefully forget, by whose Power and for whose Service they were thus exalted and blessed, he can easily make them know by unexpected Judgements, *that the most High ruleth in the Kingdom of Men* *, and doth according to his Will in the Armies of Heaven, and amongst the Inhabitants of the Earth. But Princes and their People, joining together in thankful Obedience to the Laws of their great Benefactor, will be happy in themselves and each other, will *shine as Lights in the World* † ; and, to speak in the Language of the Prophet, *upon all their Glory there shall be a Defence* ‡.

* Dan. iv. 25.

† Phil. ii. 15.

‡ Is. iv. 5.

For God will save Sion, and build the Cities of Judah.—The Posterity also of his Servants shall inherit it ; and they, that love his Name, shall dwell therein². Their Children shall continue, and their Seed be established before him³.

² Pf. lxix. 36, 37.

³ Pf. cii. 28.

S E R M O N XIV.

MATTH. vi. 16.

Moreover, when ye fast, be not as the Hypocrites.

THE Practice of Fasting from a Principle of Religion has been thought of by different Persons in so very different a Manner ; some placing it amongst the highest Duties, whilst others account it mere Superstition : and a great Part of those, who observe it the most rigidly, are so little improved by it in true Goodness : that, I hope, discoursing on this Subject may be useful in general, as well as particularly seasonable at present, to direct your Judgement and Behaviour in Relation to it. And therefore, I have chosen to treat of it from Words of the greatest Authority ; those of our blessed Saviour : which contain,

I. A Supposition, that religious Fasting would be used amongst his Followers: *When ye fast.*

II. A Caution against using it amiss: *Be not as the Hypocrites.*

I. A Supposition, that religious Fasting would be used amongst his Followers: which indeed he must suppose of Course, unless he forbid it; because the Custom had very long been, and was then, universal in the World. Not only the People of the great City and Empire of *Nineveh*, as we read in Scripture, but the *Egyptians, Greeks, Romans*, almost all Nations, of whose Religion we have any particular Accounts, appear to have been led, either by Nature or antient Tradition, to abstain from their Food, on certain Occasions, as an Exercise of Piety. The Jewish Law could not be the Original of an Observance, that had spread so wide: especially, as that Law appoints but one single Day in the whole Year to be kept as a public Fast, and gives no Orders for private Fasting at all. Yet we find, from the early Times of their Commonwealth downwards, many other public Fasts observed by them, as Exigencies required: we find the Prophets approving and enjoining them,

them, and directing how they are to be solemnized: we find the most exemplary in Goodness amongst them taking this Way of humbling themselves before God in Secret, not only on personal and domestic, but national Accounts, and graciously accepted in so doing.

The same Usage continued to our Saviour's Days. For we read in St. *Luke*^a, of *Anna* the Prophetess, that *she served God with Fasts and Prayers Night and Day*. Indeed by this Time, over and above several yearly Fasts, appointed by Authority^b, the stricter Sort observed two every Week voluntarily^c. And not only the Pharisees, but *John's* Disciples also, fasted often^d. Nor doth our blessed Lord condemn any Part of these Things: but, leaving the Frequency of Fasting to public and private Prudence, regulates only the Manner of it; and, by so doing, plainly treats it as a Practice, intended for perpetual Use. It is true, he doth not, in so many Words, command his Disciples to fast: he only saith, *When ye fast*. But so he had said just before, *when thou dost thine Alms^e, when thou prayest^f*.

^a Luke ii. 37.^b Zach. viii. 19.^c Luke xviii. 12.^d Matth. ix. 14.^e Verse 2.^f Verse 6.

Yet these are certainly Duties of Christianity. And had he not designed, that Fasting should be considered in some Degree as a Duty also; he would never have promised a Reward to the right Performance of it, as he doth in the next Verse, but one, after the Text. And besides, he not only fasted himself, in a Manner quite beyond our Imitation, but declared, that though then his Disciples did not fast, yet after *he was taken from them, they should^a*: which they verified accordingly. *Cornelius* indeed was not yet a Christian, when he fasted to the ninth Hour^b: but that was amongst the Means of his becoming one. We read in the following Chapters of the *Acts*, that Congregations, under the Guidance of Prophets and Apostles, fasted on more Occasions than one^c. *St. Paul* enjoins private Persons to *give themselves at Times to Fasting and Prayer^d*. The whole Christian Church, from the Beginning, hath both esteemed and practised it not a little: and to this Day both the Ecclesiastical and Civil Powers continue to prescribe it.

If then we have any Regard to the Example and Experience of good Persons, to

^a Matth. ix. 15.^b Acts x. 30.^c Acts xiii. 2, 3. xiv. 23.^d 1 Cor. vii. 5.

the Injunctions and Commands of our earthly Superiors, or to the Authority of Scripture itself; we cannot think Fasting an Observance to be either blamed or slighted. But for yet fuller Satisfaction, and indeed for our Direction also, let us inquire more particularly, what its Meaning and Uses are.

One very useful Meaning is, to express our Sorrow for having offended God, and our Sense of not deserving the least of his Favours. By some it hath been thought, that our first Parents introduced it, as a penitential Memorial of their eating the forbidden Fruit: which indeed it might very properly express. But without insisting on this, for which we have no Warrant, Abstaining for some Time from our daily Food signifies, most naturally, that we are unworthy of it; and can take no Comfort in it, whilst we are under the divine Displeasure. And as anciently, every Thing of Importance was denoted, especially in the Eastern Countries, by Actions as well as Words; this was probably the original Purpose, for which Men used Fasting. And it was then sometimes extended to Children, and Cattle; in Token, that the Parents and

Owners of them had forfeited the dearest Blessings, and most valuable Conveniences of Life^k. It is true, a proper Confession in Words would have expressed the same Thing, that this Ceremony doth, and somewhat more clearly, unless it were explained by Words. But in all Likelihood it usually was: or if not, the Difficulty of understanding it cannot be accounted great. And where it is appointed by Authority, or prevails by Custom, as the established Method of signifying Humiliation, we are as much bound to comply with it, as with any other Appointment or Custom; and should be as justly thought disobedient or unsociable, if we refused: even though it had no peculiar Advantages to compensate for its being of less obvious Meaning; whereas indeed it hath considerable ones. For Words alone are far from carrying with them that Energy and Influence upon the Mind, which the superadded Solemnity of such an Abstinence must, even in private Cases; and much more, when whole Assemblies, and Cities, and Countries, join in it. But above all, when either Persons or Nations have been remarkably wicked, such moving and afflicting Acknowledgements of

^k Joel ii. 16.

Jonah iii. 7, 8.

Judith iv. 10.

it are singularly adapted to produce more powerful and lasting Impressions on those, who make use of them ; and by that Means to render them fitter Objects of divine Mercy. Indeed, were every Method, which the warmer Imaginations of the Eastern People suggested formerly, and found really conducive to this End, practised now among such, as are less accustomed and disposed to significative Actions, considerable Inconveniencies might follow : and in Fact, multiplying ritual Observances hath contributed almost every where to darken Religion, and corrupt it. But so simple and intelligible an Usage, as mere Fasting, may surely be employed, in any Age and Place, without Danger.

And, besides the good Effects it may have, as a strong outward Mark of Repentance, it may be a Cause, by its physical Effects, of our feeling greater Degrees of inward Conviction. The Faculties of many Persons are overloaded by continual Excess, and *the corruptible Body presseth down the Soul*¹ : nor can it exert itself, till the Burthen upon it is lightened. And without what is commonly

¹ Wisd. ix. 15.

called Excess, a constant Course of high or full Living hath so powerful a Tendency to immerse our Thoughts in worldly Objects, and make us, both indolent as to our eternal Interests, and fearless of the Consequences of such Indolence: that all, who pass their Days in the free Enjoyment of Plenty, have Need frequently to interrupt their Indulgences, however lawful in their Nature: to admonish themselves, by so doing, that they have much more important Concerns, than the Gratification of Sense and Ease: and to view the State of their Souls with attentive Thoughtfulness; which Abstinence, and its proper Companion Retirement, would beget. Assuredly Numbers of them would then see their Condition in Respect of God, and a future Life, in a very different Light, from that, which warm Blood, gay Spirits, and presumptuous Imaginations place it in. And for Want of such Views it is, that so many are grossly wicked, and so many more very imperfectly and insufficiently good; whom a Habit of considerate Self-restraint would render by Degrees indifferent to earthly Enjoyments, and solicitous for those of a better World. Nay, even single Acts of
such

such Restraint will usually, for the Time, lower our Passions into some good Measure of Composedness, and make our Sorrow for Sin humbler and deeper : on both which Accounts Fasting is called in Scripture, *afflicting the Soul*^m. For it mortifies the Desires of the sensitive Part, and enlivens the Remorse of the rational. By these Means, it may contribute much to render our Faith of invisible Things more lively, and our Devotions more fervent : for which Reason Fasting is always understood in Scripture, and always ought in Practice, to be accompanied by Prayer. And in Proportion as it qualifies us to pray as we ought, it assures us of obtaining our Requests ; whether they be for averting God's Judgements, or deriving his Mercies upon us, in our public Capacity or private.

But farther yet, Fasting not only assists Humiliation and Devotion, but is in other Ways also friendly to Virtue. Inflicting it on ourselves as a Penalty, when we have been guilty of any great Sin, will contribute greatly, and yet with perfect Safety, if it be done with Discretion, to our becoming weary and afraid of sinning. Accordingly St. *Paul* speaks of

^m Is. lviii. 3, 5.

Self-punishment, as a very useful and beneficial Fruit of true Repentance. *For behold, your sorrowing after a godly Sort, what Carefulness it wrought in you; yea, what Zeal; yea, what Revenge*ⁿ. But especially, if we have been seduced into unlawful Pleasures of Sense, or even are in Danger of it only, Fasting is peculiarly medicinal: withdraws the Jewel from irregular Desires; proves to us by Experience, and strengthens by Use, our Ability of bridling our natural Appetities; and so prevents our undoing ourselves, by trusting vainly to the Plea of human Infirmary, as an Excuse for deliberate Transgression, or supine Negligence. Exercises of moderate Hardship add a Vigour to the Mind: and were on that Account recommended even by heathen Moralists^o, as teaching Contempt of low Gratifications, and of the Wealth that ministers to them; of the Blandishments of Luxury, and the false Elegance of effeminate Politeness. But far stronger Inducements have we Christians to take the most effectual Methods for exalting our Souls above these Things: as we know, to a much higher Degree of Certainty, that *the carnal Mind is Enmity against*

ⁿ 2 Cor. vii. 11.^o Art. Epist. l. 3. c. 12. and c. 14.

God; that they, who *live in Pleasure, are dead whilst they live*^a; and that by detaching our Affections properly from Things on Earth, we shall attain the Blessedness of Heaven^r.

Nor will Fasting contribute only to mortify our Fondness for sensual Indulgences; but also to abate the Impetuosity of vehement Spirits; and that *Pride of Heart*, which the Prophet *Ezekiel*, in the Case of *Sodom and Jerusalem*, connects with *Fulness of Bread*^r. We often find the same Persons, when pampered into luxuriant Health, overbearing, impatient of Contradiction, outrageous in Anger, who, when voluntary or necessary Abstinence hath reduced them to a calmer State of Mind, are considerate, reasonable, and humane. But particularly it inspires Humanity and Compassion to the Poor. For it gives us Experience, from Time to Time, of what they are often forced to feel: and not only reminds all Persons, but better enables those of middling Circumstances, by lessening now and then their Expences on themselves, to relieve the Wants of their indigent Brethren: for which Rea-

^a Rom. viii. 7.^r 1 Tim. v. 6.^r Col. iii. 1. &c.^r Ezek. xvi. 49.

son the Prophet *Isaiab* supposes it attended by doing every Act of Equity and Mercy, but especially giving of Alms ; and introduces God himself saying: *Is not this the Fast, that I have chosen? to loose the Bands of Wickedness, to undo the heavy Burthens, to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every Yoke? Is it not to deal thy Bread to the hungry; and that thou bring the Poor, that are cast out, to thy House; when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him, and that thou hide not thyself from thine own Flesh?* †

These are some of the spiritual Benefits, for I omit to mention the corporeal ones, though very considerable, which recommend Fasting. And surely they are at least sufficient to keep every Pretender to Seriousness from deriding it, or thinking meanly of such as practise it. Though any one may judge, or find, it ever so useless to himself; yet he cannot well know what it may be to others. And therefore, the Rule of Scripture is in this Sense perfectly just: *Let not him, that eateth, despise him, that eateth not* †. If he doth, his Contempt may

† *If.* lviii. 6, 7. Hence *Hermas* directs, lib. 3. *Sim.* 5. that the Money saved by Fasting be given to the Poor.

‡ *Rom.* xiv. 3.

light on Characters of the highest Eminence in Wisdom and Goodness; as it happened in the Case of the Royal Psalmist: *The Reproaches of them, that reproached thee, are fallen upon me. I wept, and chastened my Soul with Fasting; and that was turned to my Re-proof*^{*}.

But as we ought, by all the Prudence we can, to spare others the Guilt, and ourselves the Uneasiness and Provocation, of such unkind Treatment: so we should be yet more careful not to deserve it in any Degree: and should therefore take diligent Notice, that the Text contains,

II. A Caution against using this Practice amiss. Our Saviour indeed prohibits expressly no other Abuses, than such as Hypocrites committed: and mentions, of those, only one in particular. But as he certainly meant that, merely for a Specimen of many; and designed, that all should be avoided; it will be useful to set before you others also, most of which are condemned expressly somewhere in the Word of God: and all implicitly here.

Fasting is a Duty, not for its own Sake:

^{*} Pf. lxxix. 9, 10.

for neither *Meat*, nor abstaining from *Meat*, commendeth us to *God* : but for the Sake of its good Effects. Proportionably therefore, as in any Person's Case it is found, on impartial and full Trial, to fail of those Effects, or to produce bad ones, which outweigh or equal them, it ceases to be a Duty ; any farther than the Obligation of setting no hurtful Example, and giving no Offence, may justly demand Regard. And as the Cases of different Persons differ extremely, it is either wicked Tyranny, or pitiable Unskillfulness, to enjoin, as the Church of *Rome* doth, all Persons to abstain, so often, and for so long together, from eating *Flesh* ; and all Persons of such an Age, and such a State of Life and Health, to eat only once in a Day, or little more, of what they are suffered to eat. Prescribing such Rules, as these, to the whole World, must bring Hardships and Distresses on Millions of Persons, especially the Poor, from which they can receive no Good, but may suffer much Harm. It will give them wrong Notions of Religion, as consisting principally in outward Observances ; and multiply griev-

ously the Temptations to Sin, by adding imaginary Duties, that will often be more difficult than the real ones. They allow indeed some occasional Exceptions from these general Rules : and yet, even did they also allow Persons to judge for themselves, when their Circumstances came within those Exceptions, it would still be a Source of endless Doubts and Scruples to timorous Minds. But besides the Uncertainty, whether they may in Conscience desire to be excepted, they are subjected to the Will and Pleasure of others, whether that Desire shall be granted ; and to a large Expence for it, if it be : And these and other Dispensations are one Fund of Wealth to the Clergy and Court of *Rome*, which they have used to the vilest Purposes. No Part of all this is founded on Scripture : nor even on the Practice of the primitive Church ; which for some Ages laid no Necessity on any one of Fasting at such particular annual Seasons ; much less of Fasting for many Days and Weeks together ; and when they did fast, made no Distinction between the Use of Flesh and Fish ; but left every one the Liberty, which Christ and his Apostles had left them : as indeed our own Church hath

hath done too. For though it hath mentioned certain Times of Abstinence, which it might have been unsafe not to mention at the Time of the Reformation : yet this, being backed by no new Injunction, amounts only to recommending them, so far as each Person shall find no real Objection against them. And certainly most, if not all Persons, would find, on the contrary, much Benefit from lessening even their lawful Indulgences of Sense at proper Seasons, and the present Season in particular. But in order to our judging rightly, in what Degree this will be expedient for us, divers Things ought to be considered. Not many indeed of our Church, in the present Age, run at all into excessive Austerities : very far from it, God knows. But if any do, they ought to be warned : and though none did here, the Christian Doctrine ought to be vindicated from the Imputation of leading to such Extremes any where.

Some observe constantly a Diet sufficiently low ; some few perhaps, too low. Now for these, who live in a State of daily Fasting, to superadd other Fasts, especially frequent and rigid ones, may be prejudicial, not only to their Healths, of which they are bound to be

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Be careful, but to their moral Dispositions, and their very Understandings. It may render them less, instead of more capable of serious Reflection and religious Exercises : it may unfit them to go through their proper Business in common Life : it may incline them strongly to Moroseness of Temper. And though the Ill-humour, into which People wilfully work themselves upon fasting Days, is to be ascribed to themselves only : yet so much of it, as Abstinence really brings upon them against their Wills, is to be ascribed to that ; and is no small Evil. But farther yet : low-spirited and scrupulous Persons may, for Want of supporting their Strength of Body, on which the Firmness of the Mind in Part depends, by a sufficient Quantity of Food, increase their Fears and Perplexities most surprisngly : till at Length there will scarce remain a single Action, that they can do or abstain from with a quiet Conscience. And, at the same Time, on the other Hand, Persons of warm and enthusiastic Imaginations are heated by long and strict Fasts beyond any Thing : till they feel Impulses, hear Voices, see Visions ; forget the World to which they belong, and live in a new one of their own Creation. Now ac-

cording to the Degree, in which there is Danger of any such Inconveniencies, we ought either to avoid intirely what causes them, or observe a due Moderation in it : else our Abstinence may easily do us much more Hurt, than Service.

And another important Rule is, never to make Vows, or even Resolutions that we will fast so often, with such or such Rigour, for any particular Time to come, especially to any distant Time. For it seldom or never happens, that such Things are of real Advantage. And they have so frequently been Snares and Distresses, that all Persons ought to be warned against them : and they, who are most prone to them, ought to be most afraid of them.

But supposing we are, by Nature, ever so well qualified to receive Benefit from the Practice of this Duty : yet none will follow, unless we guard against Mistakes.

Fasting consists in abstaining, wholly or in Part, from our ordinary Food. Abstaining wholly the former Part of the Day is undoubtedly the natural, and should be the general Method of doing this. But they, in whose Case good Reasons forbid it, may, by properly restraining themselves in the latter

Part, keep their Fast to all good Purposes, after they have, in common Speech, broken it. Continuing a total Abstinence longer than a Day can hardly ever be, and so long seldom is, either useful or safe. And though a considerable Approach towards total Abstinence for the whole Day, if conducted prudently, may be allowed at proper Intervals for some small Time, when designed for Self-punishment in great Faults; as indeed lessening our Fast into a Trifle, on any Occasion, public or private, would be mocking God, cheating ourselves, and giving Scandal or bad Example to others*: yet when subduing irregular Appetites and Passions is the End in View, moderate Severity, and barely, if at all, exceeding the Strictness of an exact and rigorous Temperance, but long continued, will be most effectual.

Abstaining from particular Sorts of Food, from Flesh-meat for Instance, as the strongest and most pleasing Sort, if it be not hurtful, is very proper; and on public Fasts especially, as being the common and most visible Mark of Compliance with what public Authority

* And therefore *Hermas*, ubi supra, directs, that on fasting Days nothing be taken, besides Bread and Water.

enjoins. But still this Abstinence, besides that laying a great Stress upon it leads to Superstition, or at least affords it Countenance, may, to some Persons, be no Self-denial at all, but consistent with the most luxurious Indulgence. There are many, to whom several Sorts of Fish are more delicious, than Land-Animals ; and perhaps full as nutritive. Nay, Methods have been invented, by which the Palate is hardly ever so much pleased, as when it is pretended to be mortified. The true Direction then concerning the Fare of our fasting Seasons, is that, which the Example of the Prophet *Daniel* furnishes : *In those Days I ate no pleasant Bread*^a : that is, Nothing contrived to gratify or provoke the Appetite, but the plainest of wholesome Diet. That we ought to be full as abstemious in what we drink, as what we eat, is very clear ; and both are put on a Level in the same Passage of *Daniel* : *Neither came Flesh nor Wine in my Mouth*. The Scripture also condemns every other needless Indulgence at such Times. *Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not ? Behold, in*

^a Dan. x. 3. One moderate Meal, of Flesh or Fish, without Delicacy, was appointed by Queen Eliz. on an occasional Fast. Strype's Life of Parker, p. 131—134.

the Day of your Fast, ye find Pleasure^b. Nor can there be a Doubt, but Intemperance, or even Excess of Gaiety, either designedly preceding a Fast, as is common in the *Romish* Carnival, or following one, as I fear may sometimes be the Case in other Churches, intirely destroys the religious Use of it.

But though we observe, in the rightest Manner, every Thing that relates to the outward Act: yet *bodily Exercise*, of this or any other Kind, *profiteth little*^c, unless it be performed with good and proper Dispositions of Soul. When the *Jews*, in *Isaiah's* Time, fasted for *Strife and Debate*, to serve the Purposes of Animosity and Contention; far from being an Act of Piety, it was only *smiting with the Fist of Wickedness*^d. When the Hypocrites, in our Saviour's Time, made,* by their mournful Looks, a public Ostentation of their private Abstinence, he told them plainly, as the Words immediately following the Text inform us, that being seen and admired of Men should be their only Reward, and directed his Disciples to conceal, as far as conveniently might be, not their Obedience to Authority when it enjoins Days of Humiliation, though doubtless it

^b If. lviii. 3.^c 1 Tim. iv. 8.^d If. lviii. 4.

should be obeyed without Affectation or unnecessary Singularity, but their voluntary Self-denials of this Kind: *that thou appear not unto Men to fast; but unto thy Father, which seeth in Secret.* When the vainglorious Pharisee fasted twice a Week, and despised the poor Publican^e, he had infinitely better never have fasted once in his Life, and been humble in his Heart. Fasting is in general a Remedy, or needful Precaution: therefore whoever takes it, confesses, by so doing, either a Disease or a peculiar Liableness to one^e, of which Nobody sure hath Ground to boast; and making our Humiliation a Matter of Pride is turning our Medicine into a Poison. Yet, of the two, condemning others is still worse, than being vain of ourselves. *Let not him therefore, which eateth not, judge him^e that eateth*, for very possibly *God hath received and accepted him^e*; but remember, that both the Apostles, and our Saviour himself, were unjustly censured by the Jews on this very Accountⁿ. The Persons, whom you blame for not fasting, may fast, in Effect at least, more than you know

^e Luke xviii. 11, 12.

§ 5. N^o 9.

^e Rom. xiv. 3.

^f Taylor, Holy Living, c. 4.

ⁿ Matth. ix. 14. xi. 19.

of; or may have little or no Need of it, and be possessed, without it, of all the Good, that was designed to be attained by it. For it is but an Instrument: and whether the Work be chiefly done by this Instrument or that, provided it be well done, is not material: and, if it remain undone, having used the Instrument ever so much will intitle us to no Reward. Fasting, as managed by some, is or appears to be extremely difficult: and hence they are apt to think, that Heaven is much indebted to them for it: whereas perhaps they are much in Fault for making it so difficult: or, if they are not, at best they have done only their Duty, and so are unprofitable Servants¹. Even the truest and the greatest Virtues cannot deserve the Pardon of our past Iniquities, and the Recompence of future Happiness; but only qualify us to receive them from God's Mercy, granted for the Sake of our blessed Redeemer: much less then can bodily Austerities, which are only Means of Virtue, do either of these Things. But, least of all, will they be able to do it for those, who, on the supposed Merit of them, venture on such

¹ Luke xvii. 10.

Transgressions as they like, and so make *Christ the Minister of Sin* ².

Deluding ourselves by such Contrivances, and attempting to impose upon God the Performance of some small Part of what he requires, instead of the Whole, is as real, and more absurd and fatal Hypocrisy, than endeavouring to deceive our Fellow-creatures. It therefore comes directly under the Prohibition of the Text: and we have peculiar Need to be on our Guard against it at present. Of late Years we have observed public Fasts with more Strictness and Devotion, than had been seen amongst us in the Memory of Man. And so far all was well. But have we been afterwards uniformly pious and virtuous, watchful against all Sin, and Occasions of Sin, attentive to our spiritual State and the great Concerns of Eternity? Or have we thought, that crowding the Churches for a Day, and abstaining from a Folly or two for a Winter, perhaps with an ill Will, was Religion enough to save the Nation and our Souls? If any Thing like such Imaginations have taken hold of us, we have adulterated and debased a powerful Re-

² Gal. ii. 17.

medy into an useleſs and miſchievous Palliative, and while we truſt to it, are farther from the Hope of a radical Cure than ever. And were we to amend more thoroughly but for a ſhort Time only, our Caſe will be very little better. *O Ephraim, what ſhall I do unto thee? O Judah, what ſhall I do unto thee? For your Goodneſs is as a Morning Cloud, and as the early Dew it goeth away*¹. Let us therefore, now and at all Times, conſcientiouſly beware of this, and every Error, in Reſpect of religious Mortifications. Let us neither ſuperſtitiouſly over-value, nor profanely deſpiſe, Inſtitutions for that Purpoſe: neither treat ourſelves with unprofitable Harſhneſs, nor with hurtful Indulgence: neither be influenced by ſervile Dread, nor by irreverent Preſumption: neither ſubmit our Conſciences to the Commands of Men, as if they were Doctrines of God; nor contemptuouſly reject proper Helps for obeying the Laws of God, as worthleſs Inventions of Men: neither exalt the Means into the ſame Rank with the End, nor hope to arrive at the End without the Means. Let us, after the Example of the holy Apoſtle, *ſo run, as not uncertainly; ſo fight, as not beating the Air*: but, with

¹ Hoſ. vi. 4.

strict and yet prudent Discipline, *keep under the Body, and bring it into Subjection^m. For every Man, that striveth for the Mastery, is temperate in all Things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible Crown, but we an incorruptibleⁿ. Which that we may all obtain, &c.*

ⁱ Cor. ix. 26, 27.

ⁿ Ibid. Ver. 25.

S E R M O N XV.

PROV. xxii. 1.

A good Name is rather to be chosen, than great Riches.

IT seems very natural to wish, that amidst the great Variety of Things, which on various Accounts appear desirable in this World, we could pass a right Judgement concerning the proportionable Value of each : that so we might determine, what Share of our Attention they severally merit ; and, when they interfere, which ought to have the Preference. Yet this we find to be, in most Cases, far beyond our Skill. Whether Power, or Wealth, or Ease, an active or a contemplative Life, a private Station or a public, this Profession and Employment or that, be more eligible ; always hath been disputed, and always will.

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For the Decision will depend on Circumstances too numerous and too uncertain to be considered with Exactness. And indeed it is for the Interest of Mankind, that the Answers to Questions of this Sort should be involved in Obscurity. For, suppose we all knew how to chuse, yet we could not all have our Choice. And, as the Whole must consist of very different Parts; it is well that our not knowing, which Condition would be the best for us, contributes to our receiving, as we are bound, whatever falls to our Lot, with a chearful Acquiescence in the Appointment of Providence.

But though our Maker's Wisdom hath left us greatly in the Dark about such Matters, in which taking one Course or another is but seldom of considerable, if any, Importance to the most important of all Things, the Performance of our Duty: yet, in whatever hath a stated Connection with that, he hath given us plain Directions, both by Reason and Scripture, how we are to judge and behave. Now there is Nothing more closely connected with Virtue, than Reputation: and therefore he hath connected it as closely with our Happiness: not only teaching us, by Nature, to esteem it

as the chief of outward Blessings; but by Revelation to preserve and cherish it with assiduous Care. The Text, which I have read to you, prefers *a good Name to great Riches*. Another saith, it is *better than precious Ointment*^a: that is, than the costliest Perfumes that were anciently used, in the gayest Entertainments of the voluptuous, or the Funeral Honours of the great. And throughout the Word of God, we are excited by Examples, as well as Precepts, to aim diligently at *obtaining a good Report*^b. Accordingly Mankind in all Ages have been strongly influenced by this Principle; and, in a great Measure, to what they ought.

But still as the most powerful Motives are apt to be slighted by some, and the rightest perverted by others: there are Numbers, who profess to have scarce any Regard to Reputation; and still greater, who pay it a very undue Regard. Therefore, it may be useful to shew you the Wrongness and the Danger,

^a Eccl. vii. 1.
 Acts vi. 3. x. 22. xxii. 12.
 Heb. xi. 2. 3 John 12.

^b 1 Sam. ii. 24. Prov. xv. 30.
 Phil. iv. 8. 1 Tim. iii. 7.

I. Of having too little Concern about it.

II. Of having too much.

I. Of having too little. One meets, not very uncommonly, with those who affect a perfect Indifference to what a silly or malicious World, that hath Nothing to do with them or their Affairs, may please to think or talk about them. I say, they affect this ; because, for the most Part, it is mere Affectation : and while they pretend not to be moved at all by what is reported of them, they plainly are moved by it greatly : not enough perhaps to conduct themselves with more Discretion upon it, (and so much the worse for them ;) but enough to be very uneasy and angry about it. Now what really disturbs them, it is a Folly to put on the Air of despising : and the only sensible Method is, to take Care and avoid it.

But they plead, that avoiding Censure is impossible : People will say ill-natured Things, and make spiteful Constructions : some will always be raising Stories, and others believing them : and why should one give one's self Trouble to prevent what after all cannot be prevented ?

prevented? Nor can it be denied, that the World is very censorious: but it is by no Means true, that they who keep on their Guard, and they who do not, fare alike in it. Sometimes indeed very innocent and prudent Persons may fall under very cruel Imputations: but they rarely continue under them. And therefore, if it be not a Rule without Exception, it is one with but few Exceptions, that whoever is much and generally and long evil spoken of, hath been faulty: very probably not in the Degree, perhaps not in the Manner, that is charged: but there hath been either an Approach towards it, or a blameable Appearance of it, or something or another that should not have been; else so many would not have judged, or at least have persisted in judging, so unfavourably. Still their Judgement may be a sinful one. But why should we tempt them to that Sin? It is hurting both them and ourselves. Professing to despise the ill Opinion of Mankind, creates a shrewd Suspicion, that we have deserved it. For if we have not; why do we lie so quiet under it? Why not explain our past Conduct, if there be Opportunity; or, however, watch so carefully over our future Behaviour, as by Degrees

grees to silence Calumny? It is our Duty, not only to be harmless, but useful in the World; and of what Use can any Person hope to be whom Obloquy depretiates, and exposes to Dislike? It is our Duty, not only to be virtuous, but exemplary in Virtue: and instead of that, we appear Examples of Wickedness, if we neglect Aspersions thrown upon us, when we could wipe them off. And as every new Example of it, real or seeming, adds new Encouragement to it; the worst of Sinners heinously aggravate their Sins, by shewing that they are not ashamed of them; besides the Imprudence of provoking private and public Indignation or Contempt.

But let the guilty manage as they will, surely the innocent must see, that their Interest is, not to confound themselves with the former, and share in their Reproach by disregarding Reputation; but distinguish themselves by a constant, though unaffected, Attention to it. Ill People may have their Ends in desiring that you should appear like them: but your Business is to appear different from them: otherwise you are so far virtuous to no Purpose. And therefore, you forget yourself strangely, if you give up an Advantage, that
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is peculiar to you. A good Name, of all Things, is what a bad Person cannot secure. And therefore you, that can, should on no Account fail of doing it.

The Judgement of others concerning us deserves Respect: and to pay it none, is a shocking Want of Modesty. Besides, Preservation of mutual Esteem makes Persons amiable to each other: and in that Way contributes largely to their common Happiness. For it is hateful to think of living in the Midst of bad Characters only: and that single Consideration should excite us powerfully to keep the Face of Things from having that Look. But further, the Sense of Shame was given us by our Maker for a Guard to our Sense of Duty. And as we want, on many Occasions, every Guard that we can have; we know not what Evils may follow throwing aside this. Persons, who care not what they are thought, are in a very likely Way not to care what they do. And therefore, St. *Paul* hath most judiciously intermixed, as being intimately connected, Regard to Principle, and Regard to Character. *Whatsoever Things are true, whatsoever Things are honourable; whatsoever Things are lovely,*

whatsoever Things are of good Report ; if there be any Virtue, and if there be any Praise ; think on these Things^c.

But were Contempt of Reputation ever so consistent with our Innocence, it would be greatly contrary to our Interest notwithstanding. A lost, or even a doubtful Fame, in some Points, fixes an almost indelible Mark upon Persons, which deprives them of many Advantages in Life, and often delivers them over to Scorn and Wretchedness, for the rest of their Days. Nay, even when Nothing bad can be said of any one, yet if but little Good can, this alone will usually have an unhappy Influence on his future Situation : whereas an eminently fair Character prepossesses every Body in the Favour of him who bears it : engages friendly Treatment, begets Trust and Confidence, gives Credit and Weight. Such will always be sought after and employed, respected in their Prosperity, assisted under Distresses : in short this Distinction is, in Effect, beyond all that can be named, Honour, and Power, and Wealth.

But then further, it is Pleasure too, which

^c Phil. iv. 8.

only one other, near akin to it, can exceed or equal. For next to the Consciousness of being good and worthy, that of being esteemed so, especially by those, who are such themselves, is undoubtedly the joyfullest Feeling in the Heart of Man, and diffuses the highest Satisfaction through every Intercourse of Life. But very afflicting must their inward Sensations be, who know they are justly hated, suspected or despised: and in the Midst of Society must wander about, unesteemed and friendless.

Another very material Consideration is, that, though Offenders often return completely to their Duty, it is but seldom and imperfectly that they ever regain their Characters, when once forfeited: whereas, by preserving them, they secure not only many and great present Benefits, but the pleasing Prospect, in which our Maker hath, with unspeakable Goodness, formed us to delight, of leaving an honourable Memory behind them for their Family to inherit; and a valuable Bequest it frequently proves: while hereditary Infamy is the cruel Portion, that others leave to their Posterity and Kindred. *Have Regard to thy Name, saith the wise Son of Sirach, for that shall continue*

above a thousand great Treasures of Gold. A happy Life hath but a few Days: but a good Name endureth for ever^d. On all Accounts then it is our Wisdom as well as our Duty, to *provide for honest Things, not only in the Sight of the Lord, but also in the Sight of Men*^e.

Still, it must be owned, there are Occasions on which neglecting both Parts of this Rule may appear the shortest Way to worldly Prosperity. But these Appearances are often deceitful. And when they prove such, what hath the Wretch, who ventures upon this Course, done? He hath lost his Honour, and lost his Peace, and got Nothing for them. But whatever he gets, he will find his Bargain at last a very dear one. He will feel himself inwardly no longer the same Man, that he was: he will see himself treated, by the better Part of Mankind at least, with the Coldness, which he knows to come short of his Desert; the Respect paid him by the rest will be of very uncertain Duration; and while it lasts, he will perceive it, by many a Token, to be mere Outside. He will be afraid perpetually, that some Turn of Affairs may take

^d Eccles xli. 12, 13.^e 2 Cor. viii. 21.

away from him the Advantages of his Baseness, and leave him only the Ignominy of it. Or, how well soever he may escape, or how little soever he may value, the Shame of this World ; that of the next can neither be avoided nor contemned.

There can be no Doubt then, but Reputation deserves a very great Regard. And therefore I proceed,

II. To warn you against shewing an over-great Regard to it.

Many seem to think, that a fair Appearance is all they want : and accordingly take little Care to support it by Reality. But, without the latter, the former will quickly be seen through. And in the mean Time, while few or none else know them, their Knowledge of themselves, and perpetual Fears that others will find them out, must surely leave them very small Pleasure in *having*, as the Scripture expresses it, *a Name that they live, and being in Truth dead*^f.

Many more, if they are guilty of Nothing, which the World thinks enormous, imagine they are quite as good as they need to be :

^f Rev. iii. 1.

forgetting, that *the Lord seeth not as Man seeth*^e, but often *that, which is highly esteemed amongst Men, is Abomination in the Sight of God*^h, who knows the secret Springs, whence every Word and Action flow. Let us reflect then, that we are to approve our Lives and Hearts, not merely to our Fellow-creatures; but to our Maker, who is perfect in Holiness: that we may indeed *have whereof to glory before Men; but we can not before God*ⁱ; *in whose Sight shall no Man living be justified*^k by his own Works. *Blessed is he, to whom Faith in Christ, productive of continual Study to amend and improve, is counted for Righteousness: for to him the Lord will not impute Sin*^l.

But a still worse Degree, if possible, of immoderate Regard to our Reputation is, when, to raise or preserve it, we transgress our Duty. And it is surely a strange Perverseness in human Nature, that, though Fear of Disesteem, with every other Motive added to it, is frequently insufficient to keep us from acting wrong; yet, on other Occasions, that Fear

^e 1 Sam. xvi. 7.^h Pf. cxliii. 2.ⁱ Rom. iv. 5—8.^h Luke xvi. 15.

Rom. iii. 20.

ⁱ Rom. iv. 2.

Gal. ii. 16. iii. 11.

alone, in Opposition to every other Motive, is abundantly sufficient to keep us from acting right. Custom and Fashion have brought some Parts of Morals, and almost the Whole of Piety, into utter Disgrace. At least too many either imprudently chuse, or unhappily fall into such Acquaintance, that they must lose their Character with them, unless they will throw off their Virtue and Religion. No Wonder if poor thoughtless Creatures often sink under this Temptation. *But Wo to those, by whom the Offence cometh^m*: who, not content to be vicious and profane themselves, add unprovoked the further and greater Wickedness of persecuting others by Ridicule and Invektive into the same Guilt. A Persecution however far from being formidable enough to afford any tolerable Excuse for such as yield to it. The vain, and shewy, and bold, who call themselves the World, and pretend to dispose of Contempt and Applause as they will, have it not so entirely by any Means in their own Hands, as they would seem. For, besides that the Nature of Things cannot be altered; were the Numbers of such Persons larger than it is, yet their Weight is not

^m Matth. xviii. 7.

answerable to it. And though the wise and good may, in Proportion, be few; yet their Judgement is, and will be respected by many. So that whoever is truly disposed to be pious and virtuous will never want competent Protection, if he doth but seek for it by cultivating proper Friendships; but let the Generality be ever so bad, will gain, upon the Whole, more Reputation than he loses, by adhering to his Duty.

Yet, supposing this were otherwise, it should be considered, that the Esteem of the worthless is very ill purchased at the Price of becoming like them: and that the most fatal Consequences daily proceed from Persons being led by the Folly of others, rather than their own good Sense, and that of their discreeter and more experienced Friends. But above all, it should be considered, how *small a Thing it is to be judged of Man's Judgement*, when *he that judgeth us is the Lordⁿ*: who hath expressly said, what he will assuredly verify, *Them that honour me, I will honour: and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed^o*. Seldom will this fail in the present Life; but never in the next: when *they, who sleep in the Dust of the*

ⁿ 1 Cor. iv. 3, 4.

^o 1 Sam. ii. 30.

Earth, shall awake ; some to everlasting Life, and some to Shame and everlasting Contempt^p. Therefore, notwithstanding all the Censures of this World, let us run with Patience the Race that is set before us ; looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our Faith ; who endured the Cross, despising the Shame, and is set down at the right Hand of the Throne of God^q.

Another Case, in which, to preserve a Character with their Acquaintance, Persons will do what every one else, and they themselves often, see to be wrong, is that of Party-wickedness. Very frequently Prejudices of Education, worldly Interest, Vehemence of Temper hurry them into it. But frequently also, their sole Inducement is, that if they should stop short, their Friends would look coldly upon them, and think meanly of them ; and they cannot bear the Reproach of not having been true to their Side. What a wretched Principle now is this ! And yet tolerably good Persons will be carried strange Lengths by it : and others, any Lengths whatever. We find in St. *John*, that on hearing our Saviour's Discourses, *many among the chief Rulers* of the Jews, inwardly

^p Dan. xii. 2,

^q Heb. xii. 1, 2.

believed on him, but because of the Pharisees, they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the Synagogue. For they loved the Praise of Men, more than the Praise of God. Now just the same Thing, which got the better of their Conviction in this Respect, gets the better of most Men's in one Respect or another: and they will not reflect, that as the Temptations to raise or preserve a Reputation by joining in the Excesses of Party, are often the most trifling, and easiest to be resisted, that can be; so, when the Trial is harder, the Duty is still the same; but the Victory will be the more honourable, and the Reward the greater.

A further Instance, and a very criminal one, of preferring the good Opinion of others to their own Conscience is, when Persons, having been guilty of some Folly or Sin, will be guilty of almost any Thing to cover it, rather than expose themselves. At one Time they will immediately commit a very great Fault to conceal a very small one. At others, they will begin, for that Purpose, only with what seems a pretty harmless Transgression.

^a John xii. 42, 43.

But that doth not succeed, perhaps entangles them yet worse: and so they are drawn on, till instead of confessing at first a single Error, they are shamefully convicted at last of many. But if they could, by such Means, escape ever so clear, these are not Means, by which they ought to escape. Even an innocent Person hath no Right to use other than innocent Methods for his Defence: much less is having done one bad Thing an Excuse for doing a second. So far indeed as honest Prudence will hide our Disgrace, we are doubtless in the Right to employ it. But if that will not suffice; what we have deserved we must patiently undergo, as a just Correction, and salutary Discipline to produce Repentance. There lies our Way back: and it is in vain to seek for any other. If we are disposed to take this only right Course, all good Persons will think it a Duty strictly binding them (for indeed it is an important one) to make our Return as easy to us, as possible: never to reproach us more with what we have heartily condemned ourselves for; but hold us in that Honour, of which a true Penitent may sometimes deserve a higher Degree, than those who have never offended. And though the
World

World should, as probably it will, do us this Justice but imperfectly ; yet bearing, in a virtuous Manner, whatever Shame our Faults may bring upon us in this Life, will contribute to increase our Glory in the next.

One other bad Way of aiming at Reputation, which must be mentioned, is, when we demolish that of others, to raise our own, and build it on the Ruins. Every one feels how grievous this Injury is, when done to himself : and therefore knows the Wickedness of doing it to his Neighbour. Nor truly is the Folly much less. Let another Person's Character in any Respect be thought or proved ever so contemptible or so bad, mine continues but just what it was. And as for any Hope, that it may be the more admired, when the other is lowered ; on the contrary, it will be observed, who hath taken Pains to lower it. And they, who are known to give such Treatment, generally meet, as they well deserve, with a double Share of it. Candor towards all, of whom we speak, is the true Art of obtaining it towards ourselves : whereas *he that hath shewed no Mercy, shall, both from God and Man, have Judgement without Mercy* *.

* James ii. 13.

But besides those, who are led into any of these Sins by an undue Fondness for Reputation ; they also are blameable, who allow it to give them too much Uneasiness. A good Name is indeed the most valuable of all earthly Things : but, like the rest of them, may be the Subject of too much Anxiety. If we are not esteemed by everybody as we ought ; if unjust Imputations are thrown, and, for a Time, rest, upon us, nay should it happen to be a considerable Time : provided it be not our Fault, let us make it as light a Misfortune as we can. Perhaps it is for having done our Duty, that we are traduced : and what is our Case then ? *Blessed are ye, when Men shall revile you, and say all Manner of Evil against you falsely for my Sake* *. Or, supposing the Occasion to be not so meritorious ; yet it is some Alleviation, that these Things, in such a World as the present, are of Course to be expected. We live among Persons that will detract and misinterpret : and truly we are too prone to do like them. Besides, without any ill Disposition, they mistake our Attainments and Accomplishments, we mistake theirs, and it cannot be otherwise. Doubtless we should avoid both

* Matth. v. 11.

making and occasioning such Mistakes as far as we can. But when we have done our best, it is no more to be hoped that the most excellent Person upon Earth should have from all Mankind a perfectly good Report, than that the most regular Person upon Earth should at all Times enjoy perfectly good Health. Proper Care, generally speaking, will secure us tolerably in both Respects ; at least will recover us again. And, as our Health may sometimes be the better afterwards for having gone through a sharp Fit of Sickneſs : ſo may our Character for ſuffering a ſevere Trial. At leaſt, ſuch an Exerciſe of our Patience and Meekneſs, if we preſerve them, will do us a great deal more Service, than the Loſs of a little Eſteem can do us Harm. But it muſt be ſaid again, that let Perſons only be virtuous and diſcreet, mild and humble, peaceful and charitable ; that is, let them be truly good, and uſe but common Precautions, that *their Good be not Evil ſpoken of* ; and they will ſeldom fail of ſupporting a fair Reputation.

As for a high one, that is not ſo eaſy to be gained : but neither is it ſo proper to be much deſired. He indeed who is conſcious, that,

were his Merit known, it would enable him to be singularly useful, may and should, if he is sure that this is both true and his true Motive, strive earnestly to be conspicuous: but we are strangely apt to deceive ourselves in each of these Points. And, if we have little more than Self-Gratification in View: vehement Solitude, in most Cases, gives more Uneasiness, than Success gives Pleasure. But Solitude for Fame hath this further Unhappiness, that, as very few have really any considerable Title to it, most of the Candidates for it must be disappointed: and so much the more certainly the more forward they are in their Pretensions. For in Proportion as we betray that Weakness, we strongly tempt the World, not only to withhold the Esteem which we deserve, but even to withdraw that which they had bestowed upon us. And further, if Persons will affect to raise themselves to a vast Height in popular Opinion, though it should provoke Nobody to pull their Building down, it would in all Likelihood, after a While, overturn of itself, or sink under its own Weight. Our Business therefore is to take the utmost Care, that our Foundation be solid: but a lofty Superstructure is rather to be feared than wished.

And, besides the Imprudence of the Thing, it is really Injustice to demand of the World more Regard than we have a Right to, and charge them with what they do not owe us. Nor is even this the worst of the Case. Persons, who claim too much, are frequently driven to unfair and even criminal Methods of getting their Claim allowed: and there are many in the World, who would have deserved a very good Name, if they had not been too earnest and too hasty for a great one. Here then, the truly valuable Reputation is lost in Pursuit of a Shadow, which is seldom overtaken. To be admired is what we long for: to be disliked and despised is what we usually get. Or, if we succeed better, perhaps the Passion, to which we make so costly a Sacrifice, is only that of being celebrated for some errant Trifle: though indeed, be it what it will, every Thing is a Trifle, compared to a right State of Mind and right Conduct of Life. The Reputation of making these Things our Study is what we should aim at: and as, in Virtue, the chief Point is, to do Nothing ill; so, in Character, it is to have Nothing ill said of us. After that, it cannot but be desirable to have Good said; and, in the Main, to know it. But a general and a slight Knowledge is quite sufficient.

We

We may have full as much Pleasure from that, as will be of any Use to us. And listening after Particulars, and wanting to hear a great deal of ourselves, both is wrong and leads wrong. They, whose Praise is worth having, we may be sure, will never give us a large Quantity of it before our Faces. And therefore such as do, either are bad or weak Persons themselves, or think us so. At least they take the ready Way to make us so. For there is not upon Earth a more ensnaring Temptation, than that of too fond a Self-complacency. Correcting our many and great Faults is our proper Employment: delighting in our own Praises and imagined Excellencies, a very unsafe and pernicious one. Let it be our Care then to mind our Work *by* an humble and *patient Continuance in well-doing*: and as to our Reward, the less eager we are for it in this World, the more abundantly we shall receive, in the next, *Glory, and Honour, and Immortality*".

▼ Rom. ii. 7.

S E R M O N XVI.

GAL. vi. 15.

For in Christ Jesus neither Circumcision availeth any Thing, nor Uncircumcision, but a new Creature.

THESE Words relate to that first Dispute amongst Christians, whether the Law of *Moses* was still to be observed: which, though it hath long been out of Question, and now perhaps the Difficulty seems to be only, how the Observation of such a Law could ever be required at all, was yet a very natural Subject of Controversy, and plainly a very important one, when our Religion began to spread in the World: and there is such perpetual Reference to it in *St. Paul's* Epistles, that they have been greatly misunderstood for Want of

carrying it in Mind. And therefore, I shall, in two Discourses on these Words,

- I. Vindicate the Justice and Goodness of God in distinguishing the Jews by a peculiar Covenant :
- II. Give an Account of the Expiration of that Covenant, and its ceasing to oblige or avail any Part of Mankind :
- III. Shew, what alone can avail Men ; and explain the Phrase of *a new Creature*, by which the Apostle here expresses it.

I. I shall vindicate the Justice and Goodness of Providence, in distinguishing the Jews, from the rest of the World, by a peculiar Covenant.

God is no Respector of Persons : but in every Age and Nation, they who feared him and worked Righteousness, have always been accepted with him *. The Rewards of Innocence, had Man continued innocent, would have extended to the whole human Race : as did the sad Consequences of our first Parents Fall. From these God equally relieved all their Descendants : and received them into a second Covenant of Grace and Forgiveness, on the equita-

* Acts x. 34, 35.

ble Terms of a sincere, though imperfect Obedience, having for its Principle, the Belief more or less explicit, in Proportion as Revelation was, that *he is, and is a Rewarder of them that seek him*^b. This Faith saved *Noah, the Preacher and Practiser of Righteousness*^c, with his Family, when *all Flesh* besides, having *corrupted their Way*^d, were destroyed by the Deluge : that, after so exemplary a Punishment of Sin, the World might begin anew from that good Man, with better Hopes of their observing for the future the Laws of the Almighty. Again, to all the Descendents of *Noah*, without Exception, God equally delivered his Precepts and his Promises : nor made any Distinction amongst them, till they had made one amongst themselves, by revolting in great Numbers from true Religion to Idolatry and Wickedness. And then, as he had enabled them to *see* originally, *from the Things that were made, his eternal Power and Godhead*^e ; as he had formed them to *be a Law to themselves*^f, by the Authority of natural Conscience within them ; as he had superadded such strong Manifestations of his Acceptance

^b Heb. xi. 6.^c Rom. i. 20.^e 2 Pet. ii. 5.^f Rom. ii. 14.^d Gen. vi. 12.

of Piety and Virtue, and his Abhorrence of Sin : what Ground could there have been for Complaint, if he had left them to observe, or neglect at their Peril, the Notices already given them ; without interposing any farther to direct them in this World ; only reserving for the next such Rewards or Punishments, as were suitable to their Behaviour ? And yet there is Reason to think, from occasional Intimations in Scripture, that Warnings and Instructions from Heaven were still frequently vouchsafed to Mankind.

But one Man in particular, *Abraham*, and his Descendents, God was pleased to bless, beyond others, with Communications of his Will ; and admit into a Covenant of peculiar Favour : which to many hath appeared a Preference very partial, and unkind to the rest of the World. But would it have been kinder to bestow this Favour on none, than on some ? The rest of the World were not in a worse Condition than before, though the Jews were in a better. God did not abandon the general Care of Mankind, when he took that People into his more especial Protection. The other Nations of the Earth had still a Right to all the old Promises of Mercy, though the Jews
had

had new ones given them. Accordingly we find, after the Call of *Abraham*, *Melchizedek*, a Gentile, not only an acceptable Worshipper himself, but a *Priest* to others *of the most high God*^s: and such a one, whose Priesthood more fully resembled our blessed Lord's, than that of *Aaron* did. Again we find that holy Man *Job*, though a Gentile also, fully equal in God's Esteem to any of those, who were distinguished for his chosen People, by the Marks of his Covenant.

Still, if, upon this, we are asked the Question, which the Apostle supposes to be put, *What Advantage then had the Jew?* We answer with him: *Much every Way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the Oracles of God*^h. From the very Time of *Abraham's* Call, he and his Posterity had fuller Notifications of God's Will, and stronger Instances of his providential Care, than other Men. But from the Time, when *Moses* appeared amongst them, they had unheard-of Demonstrations of divine Power, exerting itself for their Deliverance and Protection; and a visible Appearance of the divine Glory, leading them from the Land of Bondage to that of Promise. They had a Law delivered

^s Gen. xiv. 18.^h Rom. iii. 1, 2.

to them, with inexpressible Solemnity, by the Mouth of God himself: and though it may seem hard to account for some Part of it, especially to the unlearned, at the present Distance of above three thousand Years; yet, so far as we have the Means of judging, it even now shews itself, on the Whole, admirably fitted, in their Circumstances, to preserve them from the Idolatry and Immoralities of their Neighbours, and establish amongst them the Belief and Practice of true Religion: to convince them of their Inability of fulfilling a perfect Obedience, and therefore their Need of God's Mercy; to prefigure, by the Appointment of a ceremonial Service, a spiritual one to come; and by the Institution of typical Sacrifices to be offered daily, the true and efficacious Sacrifice and Priesthood of that Person, through whom Pardon and Grace were derived to Mankind. Then, besides the Establishment of such a Law amongst them, God was perpetually exciting them to Good, and deterring them from Evil; by the Interposition of an extraordinary Providence, to reward their Obedience, or punish their Disobedience; and by the Warnings and Exhortations of Prophets, raised up

successively;

ſucceſſively ; who alſo both explained and improved the Inſtructions, which *Mofes* had given them.

Theſe were doubtleſs great Advantages : but that other Nations had not the ſame, is no more an Objection againſt the divine Juſtice and Goodneſs, than that all Nations or all Men at preſent have not in all Reſpects the ſame Advantages, that ſome have. It ſuffices, that of each ſhall be required *according to what he hath, not according to what he hath not*¹. But as to every Thing beyond this, God is Maſter of his own Gifts : and we are incompetent Judges, how he ought to diſpoſe of them. Yet in the Diſpoſal, of which I am ſpeaking, we may trace evident Footſteps of Wiſdom, and extenſive Mercy. While the reſt of the World was falling into Superſtition and Idolatry, *Abraham* diſtinguiſhed himſelf by a faithful Practice of true Religion : and therefore was properly a diſtinguiſhed Object of divine Favour. He was careful alſo to educate his Family in the ſame Principles ; as God himſelf bears him Witneſs. *For I know Abraham ; that he will command his Children and his Houſehold after*

¹ 2 Cor. viii. 12.

him, and they shall keep the Way of the Lord, to do Justice and Judgement^k. It was therefore no groundless Preference, but a most reasonable Proceeding; to build on the Foundations already laid and remaining; and reward Persons, found to be so well disposed, by conferring on them further Privileges; of which, with all their Faults, they were much likelier to make a good Use, than any of their more corrupted Neighbours.

Yet to these likewise, and to all Men, God had gracious Intentions in every Thing, which he did for his peculiar People. One of the first Promises made to *Abraham*, was, that *in him and in his Seed should all the Nations of the Earth be blessed*^l. This indeed received not its full Accomplishment, till our Saviour, the great Blessing of all Nations, came. But it was in some Measure verifying continually, from the Day it was made. Had all Men been left to themselves at that Time, the Knowledge of true Religion might have been every where lost. But securing the Profession of it amongst the Descendants of *Abraham*, was preserving a Witness for God upon Earth, and that

^k Gen. xviii. 19.^l Gen. xii. 3. xviii. 18. xxii. 18.

in a Part of it, perhaps as well peopled and as well esteemed, as any then known. There they *shone* forth, first in *Canaan*, then in *Egypt*, as *Lights in a dark Place*^m, to attract the Eyes and direct the Steps of the well-disposed. And this is a Benefit of great Consequence. For Truth proposed is much more easily perceived, than without such Proposal it is discovered. And when the Almighty brought them back from *Egypt* to *Canaan* again, by such amazing Miracles as the Scripture relates, these were so many loud Declarations from Heaven to Mankind, concerning their Duty : nor have we Reason to doubt, but many were alarmed and convinced by their Means : which indeed is expressly mentioned, as one End proposed by them : *And the Egyptians shall know, that I am the Lord*ⁿ. Accordingly there *went out*, we read, *a mixed Multitude with*^o *the Israelites* : and who could they be, but such as were brought to believe in the true God ? For Worshippers of false Gods they were not to suffer amongst them. Again, soon after this, *Jethro*, a Man of high Rank, and therefore probably of great Influence, amongst the *Midianites* ; how strongly doth he declare,

^m 2 Pet. i. 19.ⁿ Exod. vii. 5.^o Exod. xii. 38.

what Effect these Wonders had on him ? *And Jethro said, Blessed be the Lord, who hath delivered you out of the Hands of the Egyptians—Now I know that the Lord is greater than all Gods* ^p. Further still : where-ever we find in the Law, as we do very frequently, Mention of the *Strangers, that should sojourn in the Land of Israel*; these were many of them indeed no Profelytes to the Whole of the Jewish Covenant, but all of them Worshippers of the Maker of Heaven and Earth only. And though, by the wise Direction of God, *Moses* prohibited the Admission of Idolaters amongst the People ; yet by the same Direction he enjoined the utmost Humanity and Tenderness to all, that preserved the Religion of the Children of *Noah*, or of Nature, in any tolerable Degree uncorrupted. In the same Spirit, *Solomon* too puts up an earnest Petition for such, in his Prayer at the Dedication of the Temple. *Moreover concerning a Stranger, that is not of thy People Israel, but cometh out of a far Country, for thy Name's Sake : (for they shall hear of thy great Name, and of thy strong Hand, and of thy stretched-out Arm :) when he shall come, and pray towards this*

^p Exod. xviii. 10, 11.

House ; bear thou in Heaven thy Dwelling-Place, and do according to all that the Stranger calleth to thee for : that all the People of the Earth may know thy Name, to fear thee, as do thy People Israel^a.

Nor were the Jews of Service only in their flourishing State, to support true Religion in the World : but under their Afflictions and Captivities they spread it much further, than they could before. Whilst they were their own Masters in their own Land, the peculiar Institutions of their Law considerably lessened the Freedom of their Intercourse with Strangers. And these Restraints, though extremely necessary, as it very plainly appeared, to preserve the Purity of their Religion, were otherwise great Hindrances to the Propagation of it. But when they were led Captive into the Lands of their Enemies, and the Punishment of their Sins had given them a steadier Zeal for their Duty ; then they became extensively useful to the Nations, amongst whom Necessity mixed them ; as both the Reasonableness of their Faith, compared with Heathenism, was easy to be seen ; and as Pro-

^a 1 Kings viii. 41—43.

phacies fulfilled, or Miracles performed in their Favour, could not but recommend the Worship of that Being, whom they served. By these Means, their Conqueror *Nebuchadnezzar* was brought to declare him, *God of Gods, and Lord of Kings, all whose Works are Truth, and his Ways Judgement* ¹. On these Accounts did *Darius the Mede* decree, *that in every Dominion of his Kingdom, Men should tremble and fear before the God of Daniel : for he is the living God, and stedfast for ever* ². And *Cyrus*, whom *Isaiab* had foretold by Name, above 100 Years before his Birth, for the Restorer of the People from their Captivity, acknowledged by a written Proclamation, sent through his whole Empire, that the God of the *Jews* had *given him all the Kingdoms of the Earth* ³.

Nor is there sufficient Ground to think, that these Notices of true Religion were soon lost again. On the contrary, from them proceeded very probably the great Reformation made in the Notions of the Eastern Part of the World, by *Zoroaster* : whose Doctrine and Form of Worship, was the purest that the Heathen knew. And many have apprehended,

¹ Dan. ii. 47. iv. 37. ² Dan. vi. 26. ³ Ezr. i. 1, 2.

not without specious Appearances of Reason, that almost the whole Knowledge of God, which the *Greek* Philosophers had, was derived to them, ultimately, if not immediately, from the Revelations made to the Jews. But however that might be; it is certain, that after the Time of *Alexander*, this Nation was diffused wider through the World; and, in every City which they inhabited, erected Synagogues for divine Worship, and for reading and explaining the holy Scriptures; to which resorted, as we find in the new Testament, many devout Persons amongst the Gentiles, who had learned from the Jews to fear God. And thus, as *Isaiab* foretold, did the *Law go forth from Zion, and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem*^u, conveying such Degrees of Light to all Nations around, as prepared them to receive *the Sun of Righteousness*, when in the Fulness of Time he *arose, with Healing in his Wings*^w.

But though they were Instruments of Good to the World, they fell at Length themselves into pernicious Errors. Being distinguished by the Observances of their Law from other Nations, they grew so wrongly vain of those

^u Isa. ii. 3.^w Mal. iv. 2.

Distinctions, which in Reality were mortifying Proofs of their Unfitness to be trusted without Restraints, that they placed all the Value of their Religion in the Outworks of it; and despised and hated the rest of Mankind, whom this Separation of theirs was intended to instruct and serve. Again, having Promises made to them of a Prince of the House of *David*, whom all People were to obey, they absurdly imagined, notwithstanding many Evidences in their own Scriptures to the contrary, that this was to be, not a spiritual Kingdom, influencing Mens Hearts, and protecting them from Sin, and rewarding them with eternal Happiness; but a temporal one, like those of this World, the Honours and Profits of which they should share, and tyrannize over the Earth. So that when their expected Messiah came, finding him not to answer these vain and wicked Hopes, they rejected and *crucified the Lord of Glory* *. Thus then did the *Jews*, after *preaching* for so many Ages to others, become themselves *Cast-aways* † : and have continued ever since under visible Marks of divine Displeasure. Yet they perform to this Day the Office, to which they were at first ap-

* 1 Cor. ii. 8.

† 1 Cor. ix. 27.

pointed, of bearing Witness to true Religion : being preserved a distinct People, though dispersed through the World, for so long a Time, as no one besides from the Creation ever was, in like Circumstances ; and demonstrating all the While the Uncorruptness of those Books, in which both they and we believe, and from which, in a great Measure, we prove the Truth of our Religion, against themselves, as well as other Infidels. Nor is this the whole Service, of the same Kind, to which they are destined. For in God's good Time, they shall give a new and illustrious, (and who knows how seasonable ?) Attestation to Christianity, by their Conversion ; and the *receiving of them* again into the Church shall be as *Life from the dead*². For so their own Prophets have foretold, that God *will pour on them the Spirit of Grace and of Supplications ; and they shall look upon him whom they have pierced, and shall mourn : and in that Day shall be a Fountain opened to them for Sin and for Uncleannefs : they shall call on his Name, and he will hear them : He will say, it is my People ; and they shall say, the Lord is my God*¹.

Thus I have given you, I hope, a sufficient

² Rom. xi. 15.

¹ Zech. xii. 10. xiii. 1, 9.

Vindication of the divine Justice and Goodness, in distinguishing the Jews by a peculiar Covenant. And now I proceed,

II. To speak concerning the Expiration of that Covenant, and its ceasing to oblige or avail any Part of Mankind. You will naturally understand me to mean, that such Things only ceased, as were peculiar to the Mosaic Dispensation: whether Ceremonies in Religion, or Methods of proceeding in Civil Government. For what all Men were bound to, before the Law of *Moses*, they were certainly bound to, afterwards. And wherever that Law was merely an Explanation of the Law of Nature, the Explanation was a just and authorized one, and ought to be followed by as many, as come to the Knowledge of it.

But the Jewish Converts to Christianity, who were the first it had, and, though not the Majority of that People, yet a large Number, were inclined to carry the Matter much farther than this. They were indeed humble and reasonable enough to receive Jesus for the Messiah: but still they were proud enough to think, that he was sent only to themselves. Accordingly the Apostles for some Time preached the

Gospel to none, but their own Nation. And when St. *Peter* was satisfied by a Vision from Heaven of the Duty of doing otherwise, they that were of the Circumcision blamed him for what he had done: till, having an Account laid before them of the Authority he went upon, *they held their Peace, and glorified God, saying: Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted Repentance unto Life*^b. But when this Difficulty was over, another very great one was immediately started; whether he had granted it on any other Terms, than their observing the Jewish Law: on which Point was held a Council at *Jerusalem*, as you may read, *Acts* xv. where after the Matter had been thoroughly debated, the Apostles, Elders, and Brethren, directed by the Holy Ghost, unanimously determined, that since the Jews had never been able to keep their own Law in Strictness; and therefore could not themselves be saved, but through the Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ; and since the Gentiles, without the Law, had not only been purified by the same Faith, but had received the same Gifts of the Holy Ghost, with the Jews; this was Evidence enough, that they were accepted in

^b *Acts* xi. 1—18.

their present Condition, as the Prophets had intimated they should : and therefore it was needless and unjust to lay a new Yoke upon them, which they had never been enjoined before to undertake, nor would be able to bear now.

But even after this, one Doubt remained still, whether the Jews at least ought not to continue observing their own Law. For it had been declared in the old Testament an Ordinance to endure *for ever*^c. And our Saviour himself had not only, pursuant to its Direction, been circumcised in his Infancy, but throughout his Life was obedient to every Precept of the Mosaic Covenant : and therefore it might seem requisite, that all his Disciples of that Nation should be so too. Now contradicting this Notion immediately and openly, must, considering how fond the Jews were of their religious Ceremonies, have proved a great Hindrance to their embracing the Faith of Christ. And therefore he did not apprise his very Apostles clearly at first of his whole Intention, as to these Matters ; but told them, that *he had many Things to say unto them, which then they could not bear ; but that*

^c Exod. xii. 14, &c.

when the Spirit of Truth should come, he would guide them into all Truth^d. And after they were more fully instructed, they exercised great Prudence and Patience towards their Countrymen: permitting, and even practising along with them, for a While, what they knew to be unnecessary; and gently loosening their deeply-rooted Prejudices. For, when examined with Care, they will evidently appear to be Nothing more than Prejudices. The Phrase, *for ever*, used concerning the Continuance of the Law, is used in that Law itself concerning very small Periods of Time; the Term of a Man's Life, the Term of fifty Years and less: in short, it means no more, than this; that what is appointed, shall be done, so long as the State of Things, to which the Appointment refers, shall last. And therefore, notwithstanding such Words; when Circumstances visibly alter, God may as justly and as wisely repeal any of his Laws, as Men do many of theirs, into which the same, and like Words, have been inserted. Now the Coming of Christ made a most evident and material Alteration. It was indeed very fit, that to shew himself perfectly obedient, and

^d John xvi. 12, 13.

prevent all Possibility of Cavil against him on that Head, he should fulfil the whole Righteousness of the Covenant, under which he was born. But when he had exhibited the Substance of those good Things, of which the legal Ceremonies were Shadows; and completed all that the Mosaic Dispensation prefigured, one great End of its Existence plainly ceased. When Men were grown capable, as God saw they were by that Time, of a freer, and more spiritual, and manly Service, instead of those formal Restraints to keep them from going wrong, and those outward carnal Ordinances to strike their Imaginations, under which they had been placed in the earlier Ages, compared by the Apostle to a State of Childhood^c: then a second Design of the Law ceased. And when the Time came, in which God judged it proper, that the Jews, who had been distinguished from the Gentiles, to preserve true Religion in the World for their common Benefit, should be reunited to them, that they might practise it together, and *be one Fold under one Shepherd*; then the third End of the Law ceased; and *breaking down the Wall of Partition*^f, that is taking away the Cere-

^c Gal. iv. 1, &c.^f Eph. ii. 14.

monies that separated them, contributed much, not only to the Uniformity and Beauty of Christianity, but to the Preservation of Harmony and Love, and the Avoidance of Jealousy and Complaint, amongst its Professors: Besides, that indeed many of the Institutions of *Moses* were calculated for the Use only of one small Nation, as that Nation to which he prescribed them, was; and neither could possibly be observed by all Mankind, nor can be observed by the Jews in their present Dispersion.

Yet, weighty as these Considerations were, many continued unmoved by them: and insisted, that all Men must keep the Jewish Law; for that, without it, Faith in Christ would not save them. And this is the Doctrine, which *St. Paul* in his Epistles so zealously confutes, as dishonourable to, and inconsistent with, the Gospel. He there shews, that Jews, as well as Gentiles, are Sinners; and, far from meriting future Happiness by their good Deeds, can escape future Punishment for their bad ones only through God's Mercy, which Christ hath procured for them, and revealed to them: that the Law of *Moses* requires perfect Obedience; and, after Disobedience, makes no Provision for Pardon, but through him, whom

its Sacrifices prefignify : that therefore, if they sought for Justification by their legal Works, as they appeared to do, they could not be justified at all ; and, if they sought it by the Grace of Christ, that singly would be sufficient : and it was doing it a gross Injury, to imagine, that when the Substance was come, the Assistance of the Shadow was requisite, to make it effectual : that *Faith* had not only saved the earlier Patriarchs, but even *been imputed to Abraham*, the Father of the Jews themselves, *for Righteousness* ⁸, and a Promise had been made him, that *in his Seed all Nations should be blessed*, before the very first Part of the Law, Circumcision, was appointed ; and Hundreds of Years before the rest of it had a Being : and therefore the same Faith, only rendered more explicit, might well have the same Effect, after the Law was taken away : which now only obscured the Building, it had helped to raise.

These Things make the principal Subject of some of his Epistles, particularly that to the *Romans*, and this to the *Galatians* ; throughout the rest he frequently alludes to them : and bearing them in Mind, is carrying along with

⁸ Rom. iv. 3, 22, 23.

us the true Key to understand his Writings ; and reconcile him with St. *James*, when the former saith, that *Men are justified by Faith, without the Deeds of the Law*^h, and the latter, that *by Works a Man is justified, and not by Faith only*ⁱ. St. *Paul* means, that Believers in Christ will be saved without the Observance of the Mosaic Law, or the perfect Observance of the natural Law, to which our sinful Natures cannot attain : and St. *James* means, that Believers in Christ will not be saved, by their Faith singly, without a sincere, though imperfect, Observance of the Precepts of the Gospel. For, it seems, there were some of wrong Minds, who fell into an Error, which indeed none of right Dispositions could : and hearing the Apostles say, that Men were *not under the Law, but under Grace*^k, and that *Christ hath made us free*^l from what the Jews were bound to ; either imagined or pretended, that their Christian Liberty exempted them from all Law, and even from that of the Civil Magistrate. This, you see, was a most pernicious Opinion. And not only St. *James* declared against it, and St. *Peter* too in his Epistle, but St.

^h Rom. iii. 28.ⁱ James ii. 24.^k Rom. vi. 14.^l Gal. v. 1.

Paul is very exprefs, that though, with Refpect to the Mosaic Rites, Christians are without Law, yet are they *not without Law* in Regard to God, but under the Law to *Chrift* ^m, and, by his Command, under that of Men alfo.

This then is the Doctrine of the New Testament; that according to the Tenor of the Gospel, neither the Obfervance of the Mosaic Law will juftify Men, nor the Non-obfervance of it condemn them; but that a thorough Change of Heart and Life from Evil to Good, effected by the Power of God's almighty Grace, is the one Thing needful: *For in Chrift Jefus, neither Circumcifion availeth any Thing, nor Uncircumcifion: but a new Creature.* Now we in the prefent Age are fo intirely fatisfied about the former of thefe Points, that perhaps we think it loft Time to hear any Thing faid upon it; though a Way is thus opened, both to underftand the Senfe, and vindicate the Pertinence, of a confiderable Part of the New Testament: and likewise to convince reafonable Perfons, that other difficult Passages of holy Writ, if we knew the Circumftances, to which they refer, might appear equally plain and unexceptionable. But then we are strange-

^m 1 Cor. ix. 21.

ly apt, if not to disbelieve, yet to misunderstand the latter Part of the Apostle's Assertion in the Text: and sometimes, it may be, to think more implied in it, but often less, than really is. And, by such Mistakes, we come to rest our Salvation on Things, that will avail us little more, than the Observances of the Jews would them. Thus in almost the same Manner, that they overvalued that Ceremony, which was the Entrance into their Covenant, we over-value our Baptism, which is the Entrance into ours; and think well of our spiritual State, merely because a solemn Promise was made in our Names, of which we have lived in the Breach almost ever since. Or if we can plead something more; perhaps it is a formal Attendance on Prayers and Sermons and Sacraments, without Attention and without Meaning: or it is the Orthodoxy of a Belief, that hath no Influence on our Practice; or the Fervency of a Zeal without Knowledge, or without Charity: it is our Fits of Repentance, and no Amendment: our transitory Warmth of good Affections and fruitless Purposes: our partial Obedience to some Precepts of God's Law, with a gross Neglect of others: or our imagined Obedience to all,

with

with a Conceit of our own Righteousness and Merit that destroys all : these are the Things on which Multitudes rely ; whereas Nothing can secure us from final Condemnation, but that which the Apostle calls *a new Creature* ; and which, God willing, shall be further explained to you the next Opportunity. But in the mean Time, as we must all be sensible, that we want something, and most of us, it may be feared, a great deal, of being such Creatures as we ought ; why should we postpone our Reformation or Improvement one Hour longer ? So many Years have already past over our Heads ; and what hath been done in them towards preparing for Eternity ? If enough to be accepted, let us thank God, and go on our Way rejoicing, whatever our Condition be in other Respects : and press forward with redoubled Earnestness, to obtain a double Reward. If we have Cause to doubt our State, there can be no Doubt so important for us to clear up instantly. And if it be a bad one ; if we have lived in the Commission of Sins, the Neglect of Duties, the wilful Neglect of any one Duty ; what a Prospect have we before us, and what Need to change it ? Let us think of ourselves as well as we can ; are we content,

content, that Death and Judgement should overtake us just such as we are? or have we not every one something to do, before we are ready? And if so, when shall it be done? Not a Moment, beyond the present, are we sure of : and why should the one Thing needful be deferred till the next? Delays are Nothing but Cheats, that we put upon our Souls : and never, I believe, did any one's Resolution of Amendment hold good, who did not resolve to amend immediately. If then you mean it at all : *now is the accepted Time, now is the Day of Salvation* ⁿ. And may God, who now calls upon you by me, grant, that *in this our Day we may all know the Things that belong to our Peace*, lest they be for ever *hid from our Eyes* ^o.

ⁿ 2 Cor. vi. 2.

^o Luke xix. 42.

S E R M O N XVII.

GAL. vi. 15.

For in Christ Jesus neither Circumcision availeth any Thing, nor Uncircumcision, but a new Creature.

IN discoursing on these Words you may remember I proposed,

- I. To vindicate the Justice and Goodness of God, in distinguishing the Jews by a peculiar Covenant :
- II. To give an Account of the Expiration of that Covenant, and its ceasing to oblige or avail any Part of Mankind :
- III. To shew, what alone can avail Men : explaining for that Purpose, the Phrase of *a new Creature*, by which the Apostle here describes it.

I have

I have finished the two first of these Heads ; and shall proceed, without any Repetition, to the third : a Point the more worthy of your careful Attention, both as the Subject itself is of the utmost Importance, and as the figurative Expressions used in Relation to it, here and elsewhere in Scripture, are not only despised and ridiculed by the profane, as unintelligible or extravagant ; but, through Inconsiderateness or Prejudice, too commonly misunderstood by the serious ; who from thence fall into Notions, which, if they are not rectified, may greatly affect, often their present Peace, and sometimes their future Happiness.

To explain the new Creation, it will be requisite to begin with the old. *God created Man in his own Image*^a, holy and pure : and unquestionably furnished him with sufficient Powers and Motives to continue such. But by his miserable Fall he became prone to Sin, as well as mortal. His primitive Uprightness, and Strength of Mind, were by that pernicious Indulgence depraved and weakened : his Affections and Appetites grew irregular ; and his now *corruptible Body pressed down*

^a Gen. i. 27.

his Soul^b. The unhappy Diforders, which he had thus introduced into his own Frame, he must of Consequence transmit, as an hereditary Disease, to his Posterity: and accordingly in Fact, a Tendency to Evil, and Inability of doing Good, is experienced, more or less, by every one that comes into the World. Then as Men grow up, instead of correcting their bad Inclinations, they never fail to cherish them, if left to their own Ways: by which Means they become worse of Course; generally so much worse, that the Nature, which they received at their Conception, may be accounted virtuous and good, in Comparison with that second Nature, which by evil Habits they form to themselves. And thus doubly changed, by original Defilement and actual Transgression, far from continuing to be the Creatures which God first made, and preserving that Likeness to their heavenly Father, which would give them the Title of his Sons, they are justly called in Scripture the *Children of the Devil*^c, and therefore the *Children of Wrath*^d.

The divine Goodness, however, was desirous

^b Wisd. ix. 15.

^c 1 John iii. 10.

^d Eph. ii. 3.

to relieve Mankind from the ill Effects, not only of *Adam's* Sin but their own : and the divine Wisdom provided a Method of doing it, consistent with the Honour of God's Government, through the Interposition of our blessed Redeemer : which Method, from the Beginning, was intimated to Men sufficiently, though obscurely ; and afterwards by Degrees more explicitly unfolded. But that he should be reconciled to Sinners, wilfully remaining such, was quite impossible. And therefore, together with a Provision of Mercy on his Part, there must also be a Provision of Amendment on the Part of the Offenders : and in these two Things, inseparably united, the Restoration of the human Race to a State of Happiness must consist. Accordingly we find them closely joined, not only in the more direct and formal Declarations of Scripture concerning this momentous Change, but in all the various Images, under which it is represented.

Sometimes it is expressed by *Adoption* : because that implies our being Aliens and Strangers, received into God's Family and Inheritance : but then it implies also an Obligation to obey him, as dutiful Sons. Else-
 2 where,

where, by a stronger Figure, it is called a *Regeneration*, or, which means the same, a *new Birth*; because it brings Persons forth into a new State of Things, where they are to act from other Principles than they did before or would have done else, in another Manner, with other Expectations, and grow up to the Maturity of another Character. In some Places again, the same happy Change is described, as a *Resurrection from the Dead*: because it raises and restores Men, both to the Activity of a spiritual Life now, and to the well-grounded Hopes of eternal Life hereafter. But the most emphatical Phrase of all is that in the Text, of a *new Creature*, or Creation. The inward Condition of Man, under the full Effects of his first Parents Transgression, answers too exactly, and yet more after the Addition of his own personal Guilt, to that Account in the Beginning of the History of the old Creation: *And the Earth was without Form and void, and Darknefs was upon the Face of the Deep*^e. But it follows: *And God said, Let there be Light, and there was Light*^f. Thus the human Soul, in the abovementioned State, is unformed and disorderly, void of

^e Gen. i. 2.^f Verse 3.

Reason and Rule, gloomy and comfortless ; till *God, who commanded the Light to shine out of Darkness*^a, shine upon the dismal Chaos, and produce in it new Appearances and Views of Things ; till he bring forth Order from Confusion, and form again in the Heart the illuminating Image of his own holy Nature.

But here it must be observed, that, in some Sense and Degree, the Scripture Expressions and Privileges of a new Birth and Creation belong to all, who are admitted by Baptism into the Christian Covenant, though none are intitled to future Happiness by them, but such as complete their Right to them, if God allows them Time for it, by performing, from a Spirit of inward Piety, the several Obligations of the Gospel. When that is preached to Jews or Heathens, every one who believes and is baptized, is *buried with Christ* in that sacred Ordinance, *raised up to Newness of Life*^b, and adopted of God for his Child. When the Infants of Believers are baptized, they are, by the Solemnity which Heaven hath appointed, *born again of Water and the Spirit*^c, into a better State, than that of Nature. And till either Sort of Persons forfeit their Claim by

^a 2 Cor. iv. 6.^b Rom. vi. 4.^c John iii. 5.

wilful Wickedness; which it may be hoped some never do, though *in many Things we offend all*^k; they continue Heirs of everlasting Life. And even when they fall under the Dominion of Sin; though, were they to die in that Condition, future Misery would be their Portion; and therefore, in Respect of any present Title to their heavenly Father's Inheritance, they are no longer Children of God: as earthly Sons or Subjects, when they rebel, are no longer such, in Respect of any Right to the Favour of their Parents or Princes: yet as, in other Regards, these latter continue Sons and Subjects still; so the Covenant with the former, by which they were made the Children of God, subsists, notwithstanding their Failure of Duty, thus far, that not only by the Terms of it, if they persist, they will be condemned, but by the Terms of it also, if they repent, they will be pardoned. And neither the Penitence, nor the Forgiveness, of those, who before were initiated into Christianity, and have not since rejected it, is ever expressed in the Word of God by the Phrase of the new Birth or new Creature, but these are ap-

^k James iii. 2.

propriated almost, if not altogether, to our original Admission into the Gospel State; into which we enter once for all, by one Baptism, *the Laver of Regeneration*. Nicodemus, to whom our Saviour in St. *John* gives Instructions on that Head, was not then become a Christian. The *Galatians*, of whom St. *Paul* saith *he travaileth in Birth again, until Christ be formed in them*¹, either had apostatized from the Faith intirely, or wanted, not the Whole, but the Completion only of the new Birth, by juster and fuller Conceptions of the Gospel Doctrine. Nor is there the least Appearance elsewhere in the New Testament, of telling any professed Believer, though he had sinned ever so grievously, that he must be born again; (otherwise the same Person would be born again as often as he falls into any great Wickedness, and recovers from it;) but that he must *repent, and do the first Works*^m, and *be renewed in the Spirit of his Mind*ⁿ; which belongs, in its Degree, to the best of good Christians. And therefore, though inculcating perpetually, that *without Holiness no Man shall see the Lord*^o,

¹ Gal. iv. 19.^m Rev. ii. 5.ⁿ Eph. iv. 23.^o Heb. xii. 14.

is indispensably needful ; yet preaching the Necessity of being regenerated, as a Thing still absolutely wanting to a great Part of those, who call themselves Disciples of Christ, is using a Language, not conformable to that of Scripture, nor indeed of the primitive Fathers, or the Offices of our own Liturgy : which declares every Person, who is baptized, to be, by that very Act, *regenerate, and grafted into the Body of Christ's Church*. It is true, a different Manner of speaking may be capable of a good Interpretation, and should be interpreted as favourably, as there is Room. But it is neither accurate, nor prudent, to depart from the authorized Sense of the Words of *sound Doctrine* : and much less is it allowable to blame others for adhering to them.

The first and immediate Meaning then of the Apostle in the Text, we have Cause to think, is, that under the Gospel, neither entering into the Mosaic Covenant by the appointed Form will do a Man Service, nor the Want of it do him Harm : and that being received, by Baptism, into a new State of Grace and Mercy, is equally necessary, and equally sufficient, for Jew and Gentile. But then being admitted even into this State will avail us

Nothing finally, unless we live suitably to the Laws of it. And as, in the natural World, God's Preservation of Things hath often been called a continual Creation of them : so in the moral, the same Notion is more evidently right. The complete Sense therefore of the Gospel Creation comprehends, not only the giving of spiritual Life at first, but supporting it in us afterwards. And we shall find the Whole of our religious Being, as well as the Beginning of it, to deserve the Name of the new Creature on two Accounts ;

I. Of the Power of God necessary to it.

II. Of the Change in Man's Condition, made by it.

I. Of the Power of God, necessary to it.

Now this Power he hath exerted, not only by giving us originally the Light of Reason and Conscience, and superadding to this the Directions and Motives of external Revelation; but by inwardly operating on our Hearts through his Spirit, exciting and forming us to Piety and Virtue, and restraining us from Transgression, in such a Manner, that whatever Good we perform, and whatever Evil we avoid, not we by our own Strength do it, *but*
the

the Grace of God, which is with us^p : by Grace we are saved, through Faith, and that not of ourselves ; it is the Gift of God^q : for we are his Workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, unto good Works^r. This Doctrine the Scripture throughout teaches. We know not indeed, how God influences our Minds : for we know not, how he doth any Thing. But assisting his fallen and weak Creatures is so worthy of him ; and the Belief of that Assistance is so productive of Thankfulness and Love, Humility and pious Resolution ; that surely we must admit it on his plain Testimony : and we can hardly lay too great a Stress upon it, provided we are careful not to pervert it, either into a Plea for our own Negligence, or an Imputation upon his Justice.

If we imagine ourselves absolutely incapable of doing any Thing towards our Reformation from Sin, or Improvement in Goodness ; we excuse those, who become and continue wicked, as having no Means given them to act otherwise ; we charge their Guilt upon God, for with-holding such Means from them ; and make it unjust in him to punish them for the

^p 1 Cor. xv. 10.^q Eph. ii. 8.^r Verse 10.

worst Things they do. For no Punishment is just, where there is no Fault : and it can be no Fault to behave, as we never could help behaving. Besides, all the Commands and Exhortations of Scripture, all its earnest Reasonings and affectionate Expostulations, have for their Ground-work the Supposition, that Man is able, as he chuses, either to receive *the Grace of God, which bringeth Salvation**, or generally speaking to reject it. We own, the spiritual Creation, as well as the natural, is in Appearance wholly ascribed to God in some Places of holy Writ : But, in Appearance also, wholly ascribed to Man in others : as, *Make you a new Heart, and a new Spirit : for why will ye die, O House of Israel*†. And we are to understand the various Texts of Scripture consistently : not to stretch figurative Expressions, till we force them to contradict literal ones, and evident Reason too. Else, if we conclude, that because the wicked are described as *dead in Sins*‡, they can take no Step towards Good ; we must conclude also, that because the religious and virtuous are described as *dead to Sin*§, they can take no Step towards

* Tit. ii. 11.

† Ezek. xviii. 31.

‡ Eph. ii. 1.

§ Rom. vi. 2.

Evil : which the very best of us all knows to be false. And likewise, if we argue thus, we must condemn or misinterpret many clear Passages of the New Testament, besides : particularly that of St. *Paul*. *Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee Light* *. Still we readily grant, that Nothing of this can be done otherwise, than by the Strength, which God furnishes : but he furnishes to every one, that hears the Gospel, Strength sufficient. The true Scripture Doctrine therefore is, that divine Grace enables and excites Men to do their Duty : that some wilfully refuse to be guided by it, and fall ; while others concur with it, and *work out their own Salvation, God working in them both to will and to do* †. But,

II. Our Christian Life is also called a new Creation, to express in a strong Manner, how greatly our Condition is changed by it for the better : according to that of the Apostle, *If any Man be in Christ, he is a new Creature : old Things are passed away, behold all Things are become new* *. But here again, we must guard against Mistakes.

It is not true, that, in Strictness of Speech,

* Eph. v. 14, † Phil. ii. 12, 13.

‡ 2 Cor. v. 17.

fallen Man hath originally no Principle of what is right left in him. If the Whole was lost by the Fall, somewhat hath by the general Grace of God been restored since. For, though St. Paul saith, *In me, that is, in my Flesh, dwelleth no good Thing*^a, yet he saith of the same Person, quickly after, *I delight in the Law of God after the inward Man*^b. And he supposes even *the Gentiles to do*, in some Cases, to some Degree, *the Things contained in the Law*^c. Indeed Experience proves, that notorious Sinners have often a considerable Mixture of worthy Dispositions. We are not therefore to look on those dreadful Pictures, which the sacred Writers draw, of the most depraved of the Heathen, as being just Representations, without Abatement, of the natural State of all Mankind. But however, that State is undoubtedly a bad one; destitute of sufficient Strength, unentitled to Pardon of Sin, to Supplies of Grace, to Reward of Obedience: till God, in the Covenant of Baptism, affords us Relief in all these Respects; and so *translates us from the Power of Darkness into the Kingdom of his dear Son*^d. Here then begins

^a Rom. vii. 18.^b Verse 22.^c Rom. ii. 14.^d Col. i. 13.

our new Creation or Birth : and our remaining Concern is, to behave as dutiful Children to our heavenly Father ; and by using the prescribed Means of spiritual Growth, be careful to arrive at Fulness of Stature and Strength in Christ. The first Creation was not completed in a Moment, but gradually finished in the Space of six Days : after which, *Adam* was left to cultivate the Garden, that God had planted. The second hath no certain Time prescribed it : but advances faster or slower, with fewer or more frequent Interruptions, to greater or less Perfection, according as Men lay hold on, or neglect, the Assistances always ready for them.

Some are *trained up*, and walk from the first, *in the Way, wherein they should go* : and though guilty of many small Errors, through Infirmary and Surprise, yet, avoiding great and wilful Deviations, they advance continually to a happy End of their Journey. Now these cannot well perceive any sudden Change in the Condition of their Souls ; for their Improvement is usually very gradual : much less any Change in it from bad to good ; for it hath always been good from their earliest Ac-

* Prov. xxii. 6.

quaintance with it. Too many indeed may imagine this falsely : but others, through God's Mercy, may know it to be true, that they have always lived religiously, from genuine Christian Principles. Like *Timothy*, they have known the holy Scriptures from Children, which are able to make them wise unto Salvation^f. And such, far from having Reason to doubt their Acceptance with God, because they have never experienced grievous Terrors and bitter Sorrows, have the highest Reason to rejoice, that they have found the *Ways of Wisdom Pleasantness and Peace*^g, from their very Entrance upon them : and shall be rewarded in the End for a whole Life, spent as it ought.

But far more commonly, Men have committed heinous Offences, or indulged themselves in the Omission of important Duties. And then more particular and deep Repentance is necessary : followed by a Change of Dispositions within, as well as external Behaviour : else their baptismal Regeneration will only aggravate their Guilt. But even the Conversion of such is not always accompanied with extremely vehement Agitations of Mind : but these differ, according to their various

^f 2 Tim. iii. 15.

^g Prov. iii. 17.

Temper,

Tempers, and the free Operations of the divine Spirit. Nay, indeed, some feel the most tormenting Agonies, yet harden their Hearts against them and go on : while others are effectually amended by the Influence of mild Convictions and a calm Concern. And whether it be a Call loud as Thunder, or whether it be *a still small Voice*^b that speaks : if we do but hearken to it, all is well.

Nor is the Recovery of Sinners always equally sudden. Some, like *St. Paul*, are awakened and enlightened instantaneously, throw off a Habit of Wickedness at one Effort, and are changed that Moment into Newness of Life. Others, after their first Alarm, long maintain a doubtful Struggle with their vicious Inclinations : one while seeming to have fought the good Fight successfully, then entangled anew in their former Bondage : a painful and dangerous Situation : out of which notwithstanding, through Almighty Grace, there are those who escape *into the glorious Liberty of the Children of God*ⁱ. And to a third Sort, whose Disorders, though but too threatening, are less violent, Health is restored by

^b 1 Kings xix. 12.ⁱ Rom. viii. 21.

slow, and gentle, and almost imperceptible Steps. Now it may be as impossible for these to fix the precise Time, when their Faith and Penitence were carried just far enough to make them Objects of God's Forgiveness, as it often is to determine exactly the Moment when the Sun rises upon the Earth, though it hath evidently been growing light a great While. Without Question, as soon as any one hath that Faith in Christ, which will produce a Life of good Works, he is justified by his Faith alone, and his Sins forgiven. But though God always knows this Time exactly, Men very often may not, or rather very seldom can. They may have comfortable Hopes and Persuasions, first weaker, then stronger: and yet, through mere Humility, may entertain some Doubts, not of the divine Promises, but of their own Qualifications, longer than they have Cause. And these Doubts may be graciously permitted, as very useful Incitements both to Diligence and Caution. Our Bible no where teaches, that every one, who is forgiven, knows the Hour of his Forgiveness: or even knows with Certainty, that God hath granted it. He must indeed, as he amends,
perceive

perceive the Alteration made in him: and in general, a pleasing Hope and Faith of sharing in the divine Mercy must increase along with it: but he may still not be sure, whether it is yet complete enough to be a Proof, that he hath obtained Pardon. Some are *weak in Faith*^{*}: others are *strong*¹ and *abound in it*^m. But conceiving ourselves to be of the latter Sort, gives us no Title to pass Sentence against the former. And we should be very fearful of judging our Brethren rashly; who, with all their modest Apprehensions, may perhaps have as real, perhaps a greater Interest in God's Favour, than some of those, who declare them to have none. And yet, if these hard Censures proceed, not from ill Will, or Bitterness of Spirit, but from the Warmth of a well-meaning Zeal, even the Persons injured by them should think mildly, and in the Main, well, of the Authors of them, lest they retaliate Hardship, while they complain of it.

But further, as the spiritual Life may, in different Persons, be attended with different Degrees of Evidence, it may likewise advance to different Degrees of Perfection. Indeed, when God created the Heavens and the Earth,

^{*} Rom. xiv. 1.

¹ Rom. iv. 20.

^m Col. iii. 7.

he saw every Thing that he had made, and behold, it was very good^a. Nor, in the new Creation, is any Part of what he doth defective. But even pious Persons are wanting to themselves: and hence some of them come greatly short of others; and the best, of what they might and ought to have been. For, though all Christians are exhorted to Perfection, and all real Christians labour after it, and, in God's gracious Construction, finally arrive at it; and some have the Title given them by Way of Eminence, on Account of their uncommon Proficiency: yet speaking strictly, *If we say we have no Sin, we deceive ourselves, and the Truth is not in us*^o; nor did even St. Paul think, *he had already attained, or was already perfect*^p.

But here, as before, it is of the utmost Importance not to err. They, who allow themselves in the habitual Omission of any one known Duty, or the habitual Practice of any one known Sin; they who have committed any single Act of deliberate gross Sin, without heartily repenting of it, and carefully avoiding it afterwards; are not good Persons with Imperfections, but wicked ones under Guilt and

^a Gen. i. 31.^o 1 John i. 8.^p Phil. iii. 12.

Condemnation. The Imperfections of the good are of quite another Kind : slight Weaknesses, sudden Surprises, inconsiderate Failures, undiscerned Unreasonablenesses in Temper and Behaviour ; honestly watched against upon the Whole, yet returning from Time to Time, Subjects of daily Concern and general Humiliation. Let no one therefore flatter himself, that because all Men have their Faults, he may wilfully indulge his without Danger. Nor let any one be so absurdly cunning, as to think of making a near Bargain in Religion : and contriving to be just so good, as to escape future Misery ; and yet no better, than he needs must. Though we aim to do our utmost, we shall be sure to fall beneath the Rule of our Duty : but if we aim at less, we shall be too likely to fail of the Acceptance of our Maker. True Goodness includes in it the Love of Goodness. No one can be religious and virtuous in earnest, without sincerely desiring to be more so ; and feeling the Truth of what Wisdom, in the Son of Sirach, asserts of herself : *They, that eat me, shall yet be hungry ; and they, that drink me, shall yet be thirsty ; for my Memorial is sweeter than*

*Honey; and mine Inheritance, than the Honey-Comb*⁹. Such therefore, as are, perhaps in no Respect, positively either vicious or profane, but negligent and thoughtless; willing to go to Heaven, with as little Trouble, and as much Indulgence, as ever they can; and, of the two, rather more afraid of being over good, than downright bad; are already, to speak the most favourably of them, in a very unpromising Condition; and, unless they make haste to get into a better, will soon be in a worse.

Another Thing still, to be observed concerning the new Creation, is, that as it may be carried to different Degrees of Perfection, so it may be attended with different Degrees of Comfort. Nor is there any Proof from Scripture or Experience, that Persons equally pious are filled in this World with equal Joy and Consolation. They, that have a greater Share than ordinary of such delightful Perceptions, ought undoubtedly, if the Tenor of their Lives afford Cause for them, to be very thankful. But such as have the least, if *their Hearts condemn them not*, may have Confidence

⁹ Eccclus. xxiv. 21, 20.

towards God ; and be assured, that the Smallness of their present Degree of Comfort *shall work together with all other Things for their future Good* *. Indeed the very same Persons, without any other Change in their spiritual State, find, at Times, Elevations, Depressions, Insensibilities, for which they can only account by Variations, visible or supposed, in their bodily Health, or God's unsearchable Will and Pleasure. Again, very bad People too often *trust in themselves, that they are righteous* ; and rejoice on groundless Presumptions ; while, on the other Hand, though the good must, in their composed Hours, feel some Satisfaction in the Hope, that they are such ; and therefore every one ought to reflect, whether he hath, on serious Thought, felt that Satisfaction, or not ; yet the Light of God's Countenance hath been frequently withdrawn from some of the best of Men, and *their Souls disquieted within them* †. Nay, even our Saviour complained, that, in Respect to the cheering Influences of his Presence, *God had forsaken him* ‡. So that no one can justly think well

* 1 John iii. 21.

† Rom. viii. 28.

‡ Luke xviii. 9.

§ Ps. xlii. 6.

¶ Matth. xxvii. 46.

or ill of himself on such Accounts, as these, The Psalmist hath told us, that *they, who sow in Tears, shall reap in Joy*: and he that now goeth on his Way weeping, and beareth forth good Seed, shall doubtless come again with Joy, and bring his Sheaves with him*. And the Prophet hath stated both this Case, and its Opposite. *Who is among you, that feareth the Lord, and obeyeth the Voice of his Servant, that walketh in Darkness, and hath no Light? Let him trust in the Name of the Lord, and stay upon his God. Behold, all ye that kindle a Fire, and compass yourselves about with Sparks: walk in the Light of your Fire, and in the Sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine Hand; ye shall lie down in Sorrow*†.

The only sure Evidence therefore of the Goodness of our Condition, is the Sincerity of an Obedience, flowing from Motives truly Christian. And accordingly, what the Apostle calls here in the Text *a new Creature*, he calls, in a parallel Place of the preceding Chapter, *Faith working by Love*‡, and in another, *keeping the Commandments of God*§. So that

* Ps. cxxvi. 6, 7.

† II. I. 10, 11.

‡ Gal. v. 6.

§ I Cor. vii. 19.

when he saith, the new Creature will avail, and Nothing else, he saith it on Supposition of its being so completed, as to answer its End: which End unless we are careful to attain, by exerting the Principles of the spiritual Life conferred on us in Baptism, and growing up in all Christian Graces; however great a Blessing in itself our sacramental Regeneration is, it will be none to us: but we had better not have been born, better not have been new born, if it only intitles us to Privileges, that we finally forfeit; and become, to use St. *Jude's* Expression, *twice dead*^b. Our Saviour hath told us, that the *Tree is known by its Fruit*^c. And the *Fruits of the Spirit* are the Virtues of a holy Life^d. If we experience these, we have a Mark of our Acceptance with God, which cannot deceive: all other Marks, all other Feelings, be they ever so lively, ever so pleasing, may. Doubtless, *if any Man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his*^e. Our pious Dispositions, our well-grounded Comforts, all proceed from the Holy Ghost: and we can have

^b Jude, Verse 12.^c Matth. xii. 33.^d Gal. v. 22. Eph. v. 9.^e Rom. viii. 9.

neither, without perceiving them. But we may perceive them, without certainly knowing by the Manner of the Perception, that they are his Work: it suffices, that, on the Authority of Scripture, we believe they are. And Scripture hath no where taught us to distinguish, what Impulses, or Sensations within us, come from God, and what from a different Source, by the mere Strength and Delightfulness of them. Without Question, clear and joyful Persuasions of our Interest in the divine Favour, if we have Foundation to judge that we are intitled to them, are the greatest Felicity, that we can enjoy in this World. But whoever relies on such Persuasions alone, instead of examining what Ground they stand upon, exposes himself to the utmost Danger of being misled by a heated Imagination, or a sinful Confidence; of which Kind of Delusions the History of the Church in all Ages hath been full. And whoever determines either his own State towards God, or that of any one else, to be a bad one, for Want of such Tokens of its being a good one, contradicts the Rule of holy Writ. *Every one, that doth Righteous-*
ness,

ness, is born of him^e, and unwisely dejects himself, or uncharitably condemns his Brother.

Let us therefore be very cautious not to fancy the Paths of Religion either narrower or broader, than they are; neither to *make the Heart of the righteous sad, whom God hath not made sad; nor strengthen the Hands of the wicked, by promising him Life^e*: for of both these Errors we may be guilty at once. But in order to avoid both, let us form our Notions of ourselves and others by God's unerring Word, interpreted with the Reasonableness and Mildness of a truly Christian Temper; and then we shall quickly discern, that the only sure Test of good and bad Persons is that, which St. John hath so solemnly delivered from above: *This then is the Message, which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is Light, and in him is no Darkness at all. If we say, that we have Fellowship with him, and walk in Darkness, that is, Wickedness, we lye, and do not the Truth. But if we walk in the Light, as he is in the Light, if*

^e 1 John ii. 29.

^e Ezek. xiii. 23.

we studiously imitate the Purity and Holiness of our heavenly Father, *we have Fellowship one with another, and the Blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all Sin* ^{h.}

^h 1 John i. 5, 6, 7.

S E R M O N XVIII.

ACTS vii. 59, 60.

And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my Spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud Voice, Lord, lay not this Sin to their Charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

AS the Interests of Religion and Virtue require, that due Regards be paid to the Memory of pious and good Persons; and as they, who have laid down their Lives for God and their Duty, have given the strongest Proofs of their Attachment to the noblest Cause: so the Christian Church hath, from the Beginning, shewn distinguished Honours to those Professors of its holy Faith, who have sealed their Testimony to it with their Blood. The first Martyr, or Witness, of this Kind, after
the

the blessed Jesus himself, was St. Stephen, a Man full of Faith, and of the Holy Ghost, and of Power, and of Wisdom*, whose Death is related in the Text. And we find in the next Verse but one, that devout Men carried him, with decent Solemnity, to his Burial, and made great Lamentation over him; undoubtedly mixed with equal Triumph, that he had finished his Course in so exemplary a Manner: nor were they withheld from it by Fear of the Resentment, to which so public an Instance of Respect must provoke his Murderers, and all their Adherents. Two of the most ancient Monuments of Ecclesiastical History, that we have, excepting the New Testament, are the Accounts of the Martyrdom of Ignatius and Polycarp, both Disciples of St. John, written, at the Time of their Suffering, by the Churches of Antioch and Smyrna, of which they were Bishops. And in those they mention, as of Course, their Purpose of celebrating yearly the Festival of their Birth-days, of their Entrance into a better Life, for the Commemoration of their excellent Graces, and the Incitement of others to imitate them. Thus did they provide, that the righteous should be

* Acts vi. 3, 5, 8, 10.

had in everlasting Remembrance^b : and observed the more particular Direction, given to that Intent in the Epistle to the *Hebrews* : *Remember them, which have [had^c] the Rule over you, who have spoken unto you the Word of God ; whose Faith follow, considering the End, the Event, of their Conversation.* The rest of the primitive Churches appear to have followed the same Rule : and each to have honoured the more eminent of their own Martyrs, who had been usually their Teachers also, by anniversary Assemblies for preserving the Reverence due to their Characters, and offering up Thanks to God for their Examples.

But the Increase of their Numbers, and the Adoption of the Sufferers of one Church into the Liturgies of others, and the Admission of eminently good Persons, who had *not resisted unto Blood*^d, and the frequent Grants, which in subsequent Ages were made, of so high a Distinction, with little Care of previous Inquiry, multiplied the Returns of these Solemnities very improperly and inconveniently. Then besides, a still greater Evil was, that Praises and Panegyrics too soon grew to be immode-

^b Ps. cxii. 6.

^c So it should be translated, Heb. xiii. 7.

^d Heb. xii. 4.

rate, and afterwards impious. In the Vehemence of oratorical Encomiums and Exclamations, the Saint was called upon as present, till by Degrees he was thought so : and what at first was merely a bold and moving Figure of Speech, became at Length in good earnest a Prayer ; which requested of a dead Man, who was unable to hear it, not only that he would intercede with God in Behalf of his Fellow-Servants, but that he would himself bestow such Blessings upon them, as no Creature hath in his Power. Things being found in this Condition at the Reformation, it was necessary, both to abolish intirely these unlawful Addresses, and to limit the original Sort of Commemorations to a moderate List of Persons, indisputably worthy of them. Accordingly no Day is appointed by our Church for the Celebration of any other, than the principal Saints, mentioned in the New Testament, it being hard to stop, if more were added. And amongst these, *St. Stephen* is the only one, who stands solely on the Foot of being a Martyr : as indeed it was fit, that the foremost, the Leader, of that *noble Army* should be distinguished, and chosen, as it were, to represent the rest. Now we shall
keep

keep his Festival in a due Manner, if we make Use of it to place before our Thoughts,

I. The Sinfulness of Persecution for Conscience Sake.

II. The Excellency of bearing it well.

I. The Sinfulness of Persecution for Conscience Sake.

Taking away the Lives, the Fortunes, the Liberty, any of the Rights of our Brethren, merely for serving their Maker in such Manner as they are persuaded they ought, when by so doing they hurt not human Society, or any Member of it, materially, is evidently inconsistent with all Justice and Humanity : for it is punishing those, who have not injured us ; and who, if they mistake, deserve only Pity from us. Nor is it less inconsistent with Policy and common Prudence. For thus many will be driven from amongst us, who might have been very useful : and such of the same Opinion, as stay behind, will be tempted to become either open or secret Enemies, in order to free themselves from the Hardships which they suffer, and revenge themselves on the Authors of them : from which Motives have proceeded the bloodiest Wars, the most shocking Massacres, the most heinous Barbarities,

that

that have ever disgraced human Nature. Or should Men comply against their Judgements, and live quietly; from being Hypocrites in the great Point of their Religion, they will too probably grow dishonest in others. And though their Posterity may at Length be sincere; and so what we think Truth be promoted in our Part of the World: yet if the rest should be induced by our Example to promote what they think Truth, in the same Way, it will by no Means be a Gainer on the Whole. Fair Argument and equitable Behaviour are the natural Methods of spreading it: and it will never thrive by any opposite ones. This being the Case, imagining that God can enjoin religious Cruelties, or fail to be displeased with them, is thinking so unworthily and absurdly of him, that few Things are more surprising, than the wide Extent and long Prevalence of so monstrous an Error. And Nothing distinguishes this Age and Nation more to its Honour, than its entertaining in general so right Sentiments on the Subject before us.

When and where Persecution began, hath been controverted. Some have charged the Jews with giving the first Example of it, by extirpating the *Canaanites*, and punishing Idolatry with

with Death amongst their own People. But the *Canaanites* were extirpated, not for harmless religious Opinions or Observances, but for monstrous and unnatural Cruelties and Impurities, practised in their Worship and out of it: by which, continued through many Generations, their *Iniquity*, being at Length, as the Scripture expresses it, *full*^c; God appointed the *Israelites*, as appeared by the Evidence of numerous Miracles, to execute his Vengeance upon them: which Command was probably designed to give them a greater Abhorrence of the like Enormities; and certainly they were bound to obey it. But they neither claimed any Right else to punish those Nations; nor any Right at all to punish other Nations, though guilty of the same Crimes.

Nor amongst themselves were they authorized to proceed criminally against any Persons on Account of their Faith or Devotions, excepting the Adorers of the neighbouring false Deities; or of the true one by an Image. Now such of those Deities, as had been Men, had been such dangerous Patterns of Wickedness; and the Service of them all was so full of detestable Abominations, that paying them any Honour must be of very bad Consequence;

^c Gen. xv. 16.

but paying them those, which they were understood to claim, worse than Atheism itself. And setting up Images of the true God had so strong and immediate a Tendency to lower the Reverence of him, and bring him down to a Level with the rest, that the Mischief was only one Degree removed. Besides, it no Way appears, that the *Hebrew* Idolaters held it their Duty to be such : but Licentiousness, or mistaken Policy, or Love of Novelty, or some wrong Inducement of that Sort, led them to adopt the Divinities of their Neighbours ; still believing in *Jehovah*, though practically they forsook him. And therefore, as Conscience did not require their false Worship, it was not injured by the Prohibition of it. Nor must we forget, that God having condescended to be their supreme civil Magistrate, as well as the Object of their Adoration ; owning another God was Treason, as well as Idolatry : which never was the Case of any one Nation in the World besides.

It is therefore amongst the Heathens, that we must look for the Origin of real Persecution. Yet, we confess, most of them tolerated, and even incorporated, a great Variety of Deities, and Modes of Worship : because
they

they supposed, that the former might be all true, and the latter all acceptable. And therefore it was not readily concluded from a Man's having a Religion of his own, that he denied that of the State. But when there seemed Cause to apprehend that he did, it was deemed, in some of the freest Constitutions, a capital Crime: as the known Case of *Socrates* fully proves. There were indeed but few such Punishments, because there were but few such Offences, real or pretended: for Men usually spoke and acted as the Laws of their Country prescribed, whatever they thought: till the Jews, in their Captivities and Dispersions, refusing to worship any other God, than the one invisible Maker of Heaven and Earth, provoked, by so doing, Pagan Bigotry; and instead of being the first Persecutors, were amongst the first Martyrs; indeed to true Piety were the very first, *Socrates* having always conformed to the Religion of *Athens*, and being unjustly condemned as rejecting it. Yet as the Jews were not commanded to propagate their Faith, but only to profess it, which however did propagate it in some Measure; the Number of their Sufferers for Conscience Sake, except in the Time of the *Maccabees*, was very small,

when compared with those of the primitive Christians.

For the Apostles of our blessed Lord, their Companions and Successors, being intrusted by him with a Commission the most beneficial to Mankind that ever was; that of notifying to the *Jews*, that their promised *Messiah* was come; of converting the *Gentiles* from Idolatry, and teaching all Men the genuine Love of God and their Neighbour, as the Way to eternal Happiness; became, for undertaking this good Work, (though they proceeded in it most respectfully to Magistrates, and inoffensively to all Men) Objects of public Rage, instead of Gratitude. Nor were they only, but their Followers of both Sexes, pursued with warmer Zeal, and destroyed by more exquisite Torments, than the vilest Malefactors: nor was the Continuance of these Barbarities, excepting some Intervals, much less than three hundred Years. Yet none of them were retaliated, when, in Spight of them all, our Faith, by its own Reasonableness, and the unwearied Patience of its Adherents, had prevailed, and was become the reigning one; not even the bitterest Persecutors were punished for all the Murders, which they had committed.

mitted. Nor did any erroneous Christian suffer Death from a Christian Magistrate for his Errors, for a long while afterwards: nor was any Law made for that End, I believe, in one thousand Years from our Saviour's Coming. In Process of Time indeed the Rulers of the Church of *Rome*, having already introduced other Corruptions into our holy Profession, supported them by introducing this also. But when they were become Persecutors, much truer and more orthodox Christians became once more willing Martyrs. Amongst these our first Reformers were eminent: since whose Days, Liberty of Conscience and the religious Rights of Mankind have been asserted on more solid Grounds, in a fuller Extent, and with greater Consistence, than ever was done before. Nor I hope will the Members of our Communion ever forget to exercise, either due Caution against the open and secret Attempts of those Blood-thirsty and Faith-breaking Tyrants, or due Moderation towards all, who peaceably dissent from us.

And they, who accuse Christianity of the Cruelties, committed by the Professors of it, should consider, how much its genuine Professors abominate even the smallest of them,

and every Tendency to them. But indeed these our Adversaries, who would seem to abhor a persecuting Spirit beyond all Men, and complain of our Religion, as encouraging it, have singular Need to examine, of what Spirit they are themselves : and whether they do not by false Imputations, and *cruel Mockings*^f, the only Weapons which they have at Command, persecute most unrighteously, (without any Pretence of Conscience to oblige them to it) both Christian Faith, and natural Piety, without sparing in several Instances even moral Virtue. A proper Sense of their own unreasonable Vehemences would incline them to excuse, as far as possible, those of other Men, and restrain them from going on to bring Charges against the Innocent and Guilty, promiscuously. But though we were all as bad in this Respect, as they imagine the worst of us to be, it would by no Means affect the Truth of the Scripture Doctrine, which is far from encouraging Force in Matters of Faith. The patriarchal Religion is free from all Shadow of Blame in that Respect : the Jewish hath been sufficiently vindicated : and the Christian fully clears itself. Our blessed Lord reproved his Disciples, when

^f Heb. xi. 36.

they would have called down Fire from Heaven on the *Samaritans*; who, besides being both Heretics and Schismatics, had used him personally ill; and told them, *that the Son of Man was not come to destroy Mens Lives, but to save them* g. And though in a Parable he uses the Words, *Compel them to come in* h; both the Whole of the Context, and the Whole of his Instructions, particularly those which he gave to his Apostles when he first sent them forth, irrefragably prove, that the only Compulsion intended was that of cogent Reasons and pressing Exhortations. Accordingly St. Paul plainly asserts, that *the Weapons of our Warfare are not carnal* i, but that we are to *instruct in Meekness those that oppose themselves* k. We are not then authorized to raise Persecution, but on the contrary commanded patiently to suffer it. And therefore I now proceed,

II. To shew the Excellency of this Duty : and particularly, as practised by the first Christians.

I have already observed, that as most of the Heathens thought all Religions might be true, they were in little Danger of suffering for

g Luke ix. 54, 55, 56. h Luke xiv. 23. i 2 Cor. x. 4.
 k 2 Tim. ii. 25.

any : and amongst such, as thought their established Faith and Worship false and even mischievous, few or none had the Patriotism to declare against it, or the Sincerity to refuse complying with it. The Jews, who, so long as they observed their Law, were assured of national Prosperity, had small Need of Precepts to undergo Persecution for it willingly : which however they did undergo with admirable Fortitude, when the Sins of the People in general had brought the pious Part, along with themselves, into Distress. And it is a moving Description, which the Epistle to the *Hebrews* gives of their Sufferings. *They had Trial of Mockings and Scourgings, of Bonds and Imprisonment : they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were slain with the Sword : they went about in Sheep-skins and Goat-skins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented ; of whom the World was not worthy : they wandered in Deserts and Mountains, and in Dens and Caves of the Earth*¹.

Their Afflictions however were only occasional Consequences of the Idolatry of their Countrymen. But Christianity set out from the first, with our Saviour's Predictions to his

¹ Heb. xi. 36, 37, 38.

Disciples, that *they should be hated of all Nations, delivered up, and killed, for his Name's Sake^m*; with their Predictions to their Converts, that *all, who would live godly in Christ Jesus, must suffer Persecutionⁿ*; with immediate and dreadful Examples of these Truths; with the express Command, *Be faithful unto Death, and I will give thee a Crown of Life^o*. And faithful accordingly they were, to such a Degree, as Nothing but Consciousness of Truth, and divine Assistance, could possibly make them.

The Apostles gave no Proofs of Courage in the first Part of their History. They all deserted our Saviour, as soon as ever he was apprehended: one of them was terrified, without any particularly great Occasion, into denying him: and even after his Resurrection, nay probably his Ascension too, they kept their Assemblies very private, *for Fear of the Jews^p*. What was it then, that changed them into such different Persons, within the Space of a few Days? What could it be else, than the Completion, recorded in the Acts, of our Sa-

^m Matth. xxiv. 9.ⁿ 2 Tim. iii. 12.^o Rev. ii. 10.^p John xx. 19. Acts i. 13, 14.

viour's Promise, *Ye shall receive Power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be Witnesses unto me in Jerusalem and all Judea, and unto the uttermost Parts of the Earth*¹. With what surprising Boldness, immediately upon this, doth the late Apostate, St. Peter, standing up with the Eleven, lift up his Voice, and say, *Ye Men of Judea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my Words*²: let all the House of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, Lord and Christ³? This was not a passionate and inconsiderate Courage. For what had there happened, that could raise it in them all? And what could possibly be milder and more rational, than their uniform Temper and Behaviour: which, their Answer to the Threatenings of the Rulers, both so resolutely and so decently expresses? *Whether it be right in the Sight of God to hearken unto you, more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the Things, which we have seen and heard*⁴.

As they bore Testimony, not merely to

¹ Acts i. 8.

² Acts ii. 14.

³ Ver. 36.

⁴ Acts iv. 18, 19, 20.

Doctrines and Opinions, but to plain and repeated, though miraculous Facts, of which their Senses were perfect Judges, they could not mistake. And what could they hope for by attempting to deceive? They must each of them know themselves to be every Way unqualified for conducting a Fraud of this Nature. They had seen just before, that they could not trust, either to the Bravery, or the Fidelity, one of another. Or if they could, a great Part of what they said might easily be confuted notwithstanding, if it was not true. For ought appears, they might have returned to their former Occupations with great Safety. But if they went on in this new Way: they knew the Magistrates were vehement against them; they saw the People, at best, would do Nothing to support them; and the Fate of their Master was full before their Eyes. In these Circumstances, worldly Advantage could not be their Motive. And Fondness of acquiring Glory amongst their Followers was not likely to overbalance the Fear of Punishment, in Men of their Education; especially in a Number of them: besides that, humanly speaking, they could expect neither Glory nor Followers.

And

And in Fact they were held in the lowest Contempt by most Men, and honoured but by few. Or should we suppose, that contrary to all Probability, and to the express Notices given them, they looked for better Treatment in carrying on their Undertaking, than they found: yet when they perceived their Disappointment, would no one of them have been so honest, as to own his Error, and detect his Accomplices; or at least so wise, as to withdraw himself out of Harm's Way? Would they all have gone on, Year after Year, supporting Persecution and Death, one after another: neither taking Warning nor complaining, but rejoicing and triumphing? Hear only, what a Description St. *Paul* gives of their and his own Condition. *God hath set forth us the Apostles last, as it were appointed to Death: we are made a Spectacle unto the World:—even unto this present Hour, we both hunger and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain Dwelling-place; and labour, working with our own Hands;—we are made as the Filth of the World, and are the Off-scouring of all Things unto this Day*^u. Could they have

^u 1 Cor. iv. 9, 11, 12, 13.

chosen to bear this from any other Principle, than that, which he elsewhere mentions? *We are troubled on every Side, yet not distressed: perplexed, but not in Despair: persecuted, but not forsaken: cast down, but not destroyed. We are alway delivered unto Death for Jesus sake, that the Life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal Flesh:—Knowing that he, which raised up the Lord Jesus, shall raise up us also by Jesus:—for which Cause we faint not; but though our outward Man perish, yet the inward Man is renewed Day by Day*^w. Nor were they affected in this heroic Manner, only while Death might possibly be at a Distance from them; but the nearer it approached, the more they felt of the same Spirit. *I am now, saith St. Paul, ready to be offered, and the Time of my Departure is at Hand. I have fought the good Fight, I have finished my Course, I have kept the Faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a Crown of Righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that Day*^x. Can there be Words in Language more expressive of

^w 2 Cor. iv. 8, 9, 11, 14, 16.^x 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.

conscious Integrity, and composed Fortitude?

But this was far from the whole Excellence of that Frame of Mind, with which they met Sufferings. Could they have delighted themselves with the Thought of Vengeance falling on their Adversaries, either from Men or from God, in the present Life or the next, it might possibly have given some poor Consolation and Support to corrupt Nature under Torments and Death. But their Master's Rule was, *Love your Enemies, bless them that curse you, do Good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you*^y. Had he meant only to harden them into a bold unfeeling Obstinacy, he would never have required of them such Tendernefs of kind Affection towards Adversaries : a Temper so very inconsistent with all the common Excitements to Courage in resisting them. And had they found themselves unable to attain such exalted Virtue, to which none almost before them had even made Pretensions, they would have concealed or dropt his Precept, or explained it

^y Matth. v. 44.

away. But on the contrary, they professed it to its full Extent. *Though I give my Body to be burned, and have not Charity*, that is, universal Love to all Men, *it profiteth me Nothing*^z. And they practised it, as they professed it. *Being reviled, we bless: being persecuted, we suffer it: being defamed, we intreat*^a. They expressed all the Kindness, they made all the Excuses, for their Persecutors, which they possibly could. Thus the same St Paul: *I have great Heaviness, and continual Sorrow in my Heart,—for my Brethren, who are Israelites*^b. *My Heart's Desire and Prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them Record, that they have a Zeal for God, but not according to Knowledge*^c. Nor was this their Manner of speaking, only when at Ease, or when they could hope to obtain Favour by it: but, as the Case of St. Stephen shews, their Sentiments were the same, under the Certainty, under the actual Pains, of Death itself, even when suddenly and tumultuously inflicted on them. For he prayed at once to the Lord Jesus, with his last Breath, to receive his

^z 1 Cor. xiii. 3. ^a 1 Cor. iv. 12, 13. ^b Rom. ix. 2, 3, 4.
^c Rom. x. 1, 2.

Spirit, and to forgive them that stoned him.

Such was the blessed Temper of the first Witnesses to the Christian Faith: and their Successors inherited a noble Degree of it. They could not indeed give an equally strong Testimony to the original Facts, on which it was built; but they attested many subsequent ones of great Importance. And not only their embracing it, as they did, contrary to all the Prejudices of common Opinion, and all the Dictates of every wrong Inclination, makes it necessary to presume, that they must have had powerful Evidence for it: but their Perseverance in professing it, amidst every Thing terrible in Life or Death, fully proves them to have been thoroughly sincere, and singularly magnanimous. Indeed it proves further, that more than ordinary Strength was vouchsafed to them from above. For though natural Constancy and Bravery have in some Instances performed Wonders, yet the Performers have been few in Proportion: whereas the primitive Christians in general, of both Sexes, all Ages, all Ranks, underwent the most grievous Infirmities with the calmest Patience. Observe

too: They could have little Hope of distinguishing themselves in the Opinion of their Fellow-christians by suffering. For, though a few of the principal Martyrs were highly honoured, yet the rest were too numerous, either to be remembered after their Death, or have Notice taken of them at the Time of it. Nor did their Intrepidity arise from being trained up to the Resolution of Martyrdom. For this would often have failed: and besides, new Converts, just made, as boldly suffered Death, as any others; nay, sometimes Persecutors themselves became Converts on the Spot, and died with those, whom they had brought to Execution. Still it was not merely a sudden Vehemence, which they caught one of another. For not only particular Persons had often the Leisure of long Imprisonments to cool in: but the whole Church had many and considerable Intervals of Peace. Yet, whenever Persecution began again, it found the Generality of Christians in the same Spirit, which they shewed before: respectful in the highest Degree to civil Authority; but unmoveable to an equal Degree from their Duty to God: where they were ever so few, not to be forced

or persuaded into the slightest Act of Idolatry ; where they were ever so many, not to be provoked into a single Attempt of Rebellion ; or into making or joining any Party or Faction for their own Security ; though the frequent Changes in the State gave them inviting Opportunities for it. In the comfortless Exercise (for so it must appear to common Spectators,) of this cool passive Courage, infinitely more difficult than the active and enterprising Sort, they patiently persevered for three hundred Years. The Wonderfulness of the Behaviour moved Men to inquire into the Grounds of it : they found them good ; they came over ; and the Empire was become in Effect Christian, before the Emperors ceased to persecute.

The unjustifiable Veneration addressed by the Church of *Rome* to Saints and Martyrs hath deterred almost all the reformed Churches, except our own, from paying them even due Honours. And now amongst ourselves, Prejudice against Religion in some, and Indifference to it in others, hath made these excellent Persons be regarded commonly, either with a malignant or a negligent Eye. But if they,

who

who have acted or suffered gallantly, for the Liberties or other Interests of a single Nation, have been revered by distant Ages, and all their Faults hid under that one Virtue : how much higher Esteem do such Patriots deserve, as have born Testimony with their Blood against the Tyranny of Idolatry and immoral Superstition ; who have lived in Misery and died in Torment, to assert the Faith of one wise and good Maker and Ruler of all, of Pardon for Sin, and Assistance in Virtue, derived to us by Methods of infinite, though mysterious Goodness ; who have given to Mankind, both by their Doctrine and Example, the justest Rules of worthy and prudent Conduct in this Life ; and spread through the World an Assurance, founded on God's express Promise, (which alone could support it,) of endless Felicity in a Life to come ! Should our Accounts of them be ever so imperfect, or meanly written : should any of them appear no otherwise great, than as they were admirably good Men : should their Zeal have sometimes transported them beyond Discretion ; (though such Transports were few, and always condemned by the Body of Christians :) Or should other

and even considerable Frailties be found mixed with the Excellencies of some of them: yet, so long as we know, that they were and did what hath now been mentioned; we have surely Cause to hold them for ever in most honourable Estimation, and respect the Gospel of Christ much the more highly on Account of such Witnesses to its Truth and Efficacy.

But admiring them is Nothing, unless we also imitate them, in their Solitude for its Advancement, in their steady Adherence to God and their Duty, in their Contempt of worldly Advantages and Pleasures, Losses and Punishments; in their Meekness under Injuries, in their Resignation under Pains and Afflictions, in their Love to their Fellow-Christians and Fellow-Creatures, in their lively Faith of a future Recompence. We are not called, as they were, to *take joyfully the spoiling of our Goods* ^a, to *suffer Trouble, even unto Bonds, as Evil-doers* ^b, to undergo Shame and Torture, and to *die for the Name of the Lord Jesus* ^c. No *Temptation hath taken us, but such as is common to Man* ^d. Ordinarily speaking, we have

^a Heb. x. 34.^b 2 Tim. ii. 9.^c Acts xxi. 13.^d 1 Cor. x. 13.

Nothing to perform, but what conduces on the Whole to every one's present Benefit : and we have Nothing to bear on Account of our Religion, but perhaps a little trifling Ridicule from the vain and the vicious. Even such Persecution indeed is very wicked in them ; but needs not in the least be formidable to us. And if for that alone, we are ashamed to *confess* our Saviour *before Men*, well may we expect that he should *deny us before his Father, which is in Heaven*^h.

Let us therefore *hold fast the Profession of our Faith without wavering*ⁱ : never do any Thing inconsistent with it for temporal Prospects or Fears : never pay Court to the irreligious, by mean Compliances with their Talk or Behaviour, in Hopes of better Quarter from them ; for it will be much harder to stop afterwards, than to maintain our present Ground : yet never be moved either to Passion against them, or Uncharitableness towards them ; but freely own their good Qualities, while we carefully preserve an Abhorrence of their bad ones ; pity their Unhappiness, while we con-

^h Matth. x. 32, 33.

ⁱ Heb. x. 23.

denounce their Sins ; and earnestly pray, that they may repent and be forgiven. For thus shall we *adorn the Doctrine of God our Saviour in all Things*^k ; and be *Followers of them, who through Faith and Patience inherit the Promises*^l.

^k Tit. ii. 10.

^l Heb. vi. 12.

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